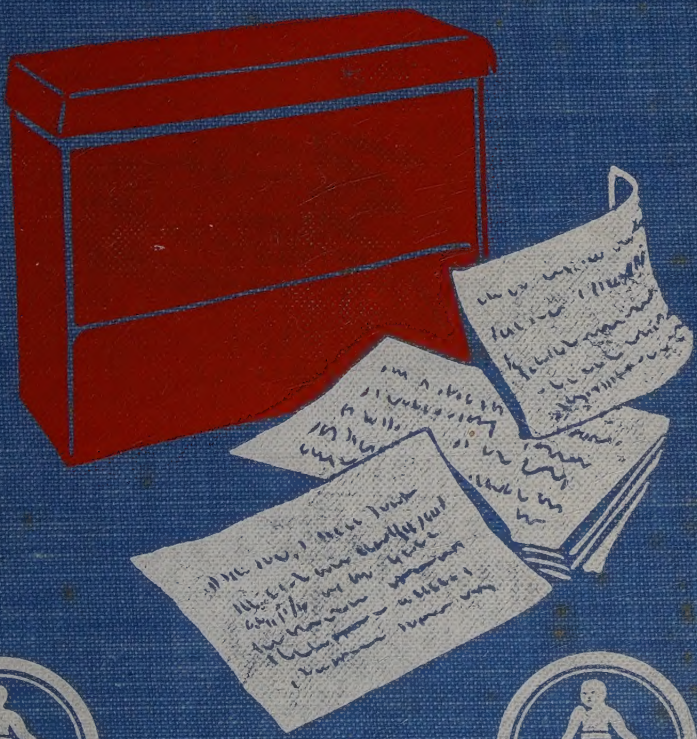
THE MS. IN A RED BOX



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John B Fassitt
861 West End Avenue
N. J.
from A. E. S. T.
Mass - Hill - Norfolk
Aug 1903.

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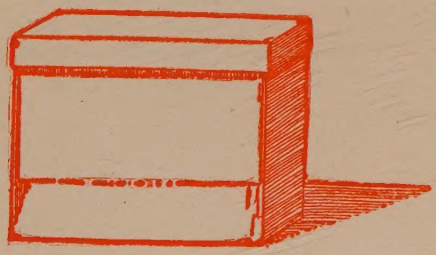

JOHN LANE · THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK & LONDON · MDCCCCIII

Copyright, 1903, by JOHN LANE

First Edition, August, 1903

Printed by The Publishers' Printing Co.
New York, U. S. A.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED
TO ITS UNKNOWN AUTHOR
BY THE PUBLISHER

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

ONE day in April last a parcel was sent to the Bodley Head. On being opened it was found to contain a MS. in a red box, without any accompanying letter, without title, author's name, or address. For some days it was not entered in the book of the firm kept for the purpose of registering the receipt of MSS.; but, as no letter was received, towards the end of the month it was recorded in pencil as follows: "The MS. in a Red Box." According to the usual course it was then sent to the publisher's reader, who reported on it with enthusiasm; meanwhile there had been no inquiry from the author, and the publisher read it for himself, and fully endorsed the opinion of his literary adviser. After some discussion, the following advertisement was inserted in the pages of *The Athenæum* and *The Academy*:—

TO AUTHORS.

NOTICE.—If the Writer of a Historical Novel, without Title, Author's Name, or Address, sent some weeks ago to the Bodley Head in a Red Box, will communicate with the Publisher, he will hear of something to his advantage.

JOHN LANE.

Vigo Street, London, W.

This gave rise to much comment in the press, and of course brought several applications from authors of MSS. which had gone astray.

The publisher learnt, to his bewilderment, that MSS. of novels have a tendency to wander irresponsibly in space, somewhat after the fashion of comets.

Later on the publisher again advertised, stating that he would publish the book on a certain day under the title of "The MS. in a Red Box," unless the author communicated with him before the advertised date.

For the selection of the title, the publisher is indebted to Mrs. W. K. Clifford, Mrs. Ford of Pencarrow, Mrs. Wilberforce, Mr. I. N. Ford of the *New York Tribune*, Mr. Henry Harland, Mr. W. J. Locke, and Professor York Powell, as it happened that these seven all suggested the same title on the same day; and the superstitious instinct of the publisher was not proof against this consensus of opinion.

Mr. Ford is responsible for the cover, which represents the Red Box in which the MS. originally reached the Bodley Head; but to the Hon. Mrs. Anstruther is due the witty suggestion of adding the Della Robbia plaque from the Florentine Foundling Hospital.

Publisher's Note

The author may, perhaps, ask why the publisher did not wait longer for him to reveal himself. The reason was that it appeared that the interest aroused in this foundling romance, through the author's modesty or carelessness, would be best maintained by publication while the incidents were still fresh in the minds of the public. The publisher holds that what is the author's interest is also his.

With regard to the business side of this transaction, the publisher will try to meet the author's demands in a spirit of fairness; but, should there be any dispute arise, he, for his part, will be quite willing to leave the decision with the President of the Society of Authors, Mr. George Meredith, and the President of the Publishers' Association, Mr. Charles James Longman, the prince of English publishers.

For the author's protection, some slight changes have been made in the MS., in no way, however, affecting the story, but of sufficient importance to prevent any false claim from being successfully advanced. The author's interests have been further safeguarded by "The MS. in a Red Box" being copyrighted and published in the United States of America. The work has been seen through the press by Mr. Richard Upton, of Jesus College, Cambridge.

Apart from the interest the publisher has had in reading the book, he has to thank the author for relieving the tedium of ordinary publishing, and, in addition, for providing him with the unique experience of dedicating a book to its unknown author.

THE BODLEY HEAD

July, 1903

The MS. in a RED BOX

Chapter I

ON the tenth of May in the year sixteen hundred and twenty-seven, I rode from Temple Belwood to Crowle, as blithe and merry as any young fellow in the world. For one thing, the day was the finest of an early season, the air sweet with spring odours and glad with pleasant sounds. The laburnums and lilacs and hawthorn and the foreign chestnuts (in blossom for the first time at Temple Belwood that year) were full of bloom. The hen-pheasants were whistling to their new-hatched broods; the fresh-shorn sheep were answering the bleating of their lambs; trees and bushes rang with the melody of small birds, and from the holms and islets of marsh and mere came a din of quacking, clanging, and chattering water-fowl, which distance mingled and softened into music. But what a pother I make! It was a fine spring day in Axholme. The great reason for gladness was that I had received good news—news of hard won victory from my father, then in London. For years the Isle had been threatened with invasion by one Cornelius Vermuijden, a

Dutchman, who had induced the King to grant him authority to drain the meres, embank and stop the rivers of the Isle, and transform the country at his pleasure, regardless of the rights of the Isle Commoners covenanted in the Deed of Earl Mowbray. When the Dutchman had completed his precious scheme, one third of the land reclaimed was to become the property of the King, another to be Vermuijden's, and the remaining third to be divided among the Commoners of the Isle, that is, the land-owners. This, without the consent of the land-owners, be it understood, and in nowise considering the ruin certain to befall hundreds of poorer folk, who lived by fishing, fowling, reed-cutting, egg-gathering, and the like crafts of marshmen.

When the first rumour of the plan came to Axholme, it was theme for laughter. What man in his senses could believe that his Majesty would empower a foreigner to lord it over two hundred and fifty square miles of English soil, diverting rivers, cutting canals, turning pools and lakes into boggy ground, and of necessity (so said shrewd men, who had knowledge of such matters, and as indeed proved to be the case), turning fruitful fields into marsh and swamp? But consternation quickly followed jesting, for the incredible thing was true. His Majesty had great need of money, and the Dutchman held command of inexhaustible treasure, so the Isle was to be given over to his will. Then gentle and simple alike turned to my

father, Thomas Vavasour. They knew his courage and capacity and his public mind. Into his hands they committed their cause, and he became "their Solicitor," as they loved to call him, though he was no lawyer by profession, nor ever received aught for his services. He had been in London on this business for some weeks, and now wrote to me that he had obtained a judgment of the Court of Exchequer, confirming the rights of the Isle Commoners, and finally quashing the scheme of invasion. My father had worsted the Dutchman —and his Majesty himself—and saved the Isle! The news would set the bells ringing in every steeple in Axholme; there would be bonfires on every hill and mound, and feasting and merry-making in every manor house and farm and cottage. I had been ready to caper and shout when I read the letter, but I suddenly bethought me that the announcement should be made by "the Solicitor" himself, and that if it so pleased him, my coming of age that day week would be a fitting occasion. It was hard to keep the tidings to myself, but it appeared right to me that my father, who had gained it, should publish his victory. In his letter he said nothing to guide me. I determined to take counsel of the Vicar of Crowle, my uncle by marriage with my mother's sister. But when I reached Crowle, it became doubtful whether I should impart the great news even to Mr. Graves, who had a high sense of his importance as the parson of a parish, and might be unable to resist the

temptation to be the first to announce the good news. The next day would be Sunday, I remembered. To think of this awhile longer, I turned my horse into a track, which wound up a little hill that over-topped the town. As soon as I gained the crown of the hill, a tumult of angry shouts and the noise of barking dogs came to my ears, and I rode down the track toward the spot from which the sounds arose. A thick growth of trees hindered my view until I came to an open glade, where a number of men and lads, perhaps two score, were gathered round an old oak. They seemed to be threatening some one. As I drew nearer, I saw a young and beautiful woman, seated on a root of the old tree, her back against the trunk, and one arm partly folded in her cloak, round the neck of a fawn, huddled closely to her. The cloak had been torn in two or three places, and through the rents showed the whiteness of her arm stained with blood. Her face was deathly pale, but her eyes were bright and dauntless.

The fellows parted right and left as I rode up, and some of them seemed half ashamed of themselves before I spoke.

"What devilry is this?" I shouted. "You vile cowards! To set your dogs on a woman!"

A stout fellow, whose face bore many scars of old wounds, nicknamed Stride-a-mile from his skill in stilt-walking, answered me boldly enough—

"The devilry is none of ours. The foreign woman has bewitched the fawn, and won't give it

up. How could we hinder the dogs snapping at her?"

"You lie, you rascal," I replied. "The curs are harmless enough now that you are not hissing them on."

Half a dozen mongrel hounds were whimpering and snarling and growling round the lady, but not attempting to bite.

"Maybe I am a liar and a coward and a devil, Master Vavasour," said Stride-a-mile; "but the fawn is ours, and we mean to have it. We found it and the doe yonder"—pointing to a carcase which lay on the ground thirty yards off—"out of forest bounds, and we've chased it, and 'tis ours." The fellow looked round on his comrades, some of whom answered the look by gripping cudgels, displaying their big knives, or setting their crossbows.

Boiling with rage at what I deemed the fellow's insolence, and forgetting the odds against me, and what might happen to the lady, if I should be overborne, I raised my riding-whip, and touched Trueboy's side with my heel, when an oldish man, whom I did not know, stepped between me and Stride-a-mile, saying—

"A parley, squire. 'Twould be a bad day's work if harm came to you; and venison isn't worth any man's life. Maybe the lady will explain to you why she wants the whole fawn. It would go bad long before she could eat it all. If she would be satisfied with a haunch, now, we won't say her nay."

Angry though I was, I could not forbear laughing that the lady should be suspected of so inordinate desire of venison, but I knew no more than the fat fellow himself what her reason was for keeping their game from the rabble. I looked at her inquiringly.

She spoke in a clear, sweet voice. "When its mother fell, and the dogs sprang upon her, the poor little creature ran straight to me, and its dear, brown eyes said, 'Save me,' as well as eyes can speak. How could I be so cruel as to refuse its suppliant plea?"

As her own fawn-like eyes were lifted to me, I wished I could paint the beautiful face as a picture of the Mother of Pity.

"Will the men take money for the fawn, if they wish to eat it?" she asked, holding out a piece of gold between thumb and finger.

Most of the men brightened at the suggestion, but Stride-a-mile answered—

"Who's to say 'tis good? No foreign tokens for us. For aught we know 'tis witches' money, and will turn to cinder."

"Oh, if that's your objection," said I, "here's a twenty-shilling laurel," which I tossed to him.

The magic of money! The sulky clowns were happy on the instant. They gave a cheer for the "young Squire of Belwood," and hurried off to pick up the doe, and then, doubtless, to the ale-house.

Dismounting, I inquired whether the lady had

friends at hand to whose care I might take her.

"My father and I are lodging at the inn of the White Hart," she said, rising to her feet, but immediately sinking again, with a little moan. "I am afraid walking is out of my power," she said. "My ankle is disabled. If you will do me the kindness to acquaint my father, Doctor Goel, with my position, he will know what to do."

"Pardon me, but that would be waste of time, and time is precious," I answered. "Your hurts should be seen to without delay. If you can manage to sit my horse, I will lead him gently."

A faint smile crossed her face, drawn with pain though it was.

"I have never ridden a horse, and should probably fall; for, to tell the truth, I have some fear that I may swoon."

She was so pale, and such a dimness had come into her eyes that I feared so, too.

"Then we must needs ride double," said I, jumping into the saddle. "I will take you in front of me, and there will be no risk of your falling."

"But the little deer," she cried. "We cannot leave the poor little beast."

I was ready to curse the "little beast," but there was no gainsaying the lady, so I leaped down again, took up the fawn, and scrambling up on the roots of the old oak, which was hollow, thrust it through a great hole, and let it drop inside.

Regaining my saddle, I said, " The fawn will be safe, until we have leisure to return. Now for the White Hart."

With some difficulty, I drew the lady on to Trueboy's back, and putting one arm round her waist, set off at a canter. Happily, she did not swoon, and in ten minutes we arrived at the inn, where the stout hostess and Nancy the maid received the lady into their arms, and carried her to an inner room, making a great outcry of pity and astonishment, and asking twenty questions in a breath. Committing Trueboy to Mat the ostler, I followed, in time to catch a glimpse of the lady laid on a squab, and of a tall, spare man of sixty or thereabout bending over her. Then the door was closed, and I seated myself in the common room, and waited, while Mistress Hind and her maid bustled about with jugs and basins of water, hot and cold, and towels and clean rags, shaking their heads, and sighing and exclaiming after the manner of their kind. Growing impatient of the noise they made, I walked out into the inn yard, and remembering that the fawn was still in the wood, and that the lady would be concerned about the creature, I despatched Mat with a handcart, rope, et cetera, to bring it to the inn.

When I re-entered the house, the old man came to the door of the inner chamber, and making a sweeping bow, addressed me in French, signifying that his daughter wished to have speech with me. I returned his bow, and followed into the room,

where the lady lay, a little colour now in her cheeks, and in her eyes a mirthful light. I thought I had never seen woman half so lovely, and I think so still.

"Be seated, sir, if you please," she said. "I have yet to thank you for your courage and kindness."

I interrupted her. "Are the wounds likely to be healed soon? Is there no peril of lameness, or enduring mischief?" I asked, half turning to her father.

"My father has little English," said she. "Perhaps you speak French?"

I shook my head; for, though I knew something of the tongue, I much preferred to converse through the charming interpreter.

"To set your mind at rest," she continued, with a glance bright and warm as a sunbeam, "my father tells me that a few scars will be the worst consequences of what he calls my folly—and the barbarism of your countrymen."

"Barbarism, assuredly," I answered; "but it is to be said for them that the fawn was their game, and they did not understand your behaviour. You ran great risk by defending it. Why did you not offer them money for it?"

"Because the heart is quicker than the head." Then she added archly, "You were not much wiser. It did not occur to you to buy our safety. You were for fighting, one against fifty, with riding-whip against bludgeons and crossbows and guns."

"Perhaps I was more foolish than valiant," said I.

"Nay, I meant no flout," answered the lady, and her eyes were dewy as she looked at me.

"The fat old fellow must have the praise for our deliverance," I said.

"Not from me," smiled the lady.

The gratitude she so expressed drove me to say, hoping to divert her mind—

"By this time, Mat will have brought your fawn."

"How kind of you to take such pains! But *my* fawn it is not, since your money purchased it from the hunters."

"Honour me by acceptance of it, then."

"A trifle additional to my life. With pleasure. I did not understand perfectly why the man would not take my coin. Said he not something of witchcraft?"

"Only an idle word. The ruffian spoke in amazement that the fawn had taken refuge at your feet."

"It was wonderful to me; the more so that I had never seen such a creature in my life. We have no deer in the Netherlands."

"You are from the Netherlands?"

"My father"—looking fondly and proudly toward the old man, who was deep in a book—"until three years ago, was not the least famous professor in the University of Leyden, the intimate friend of the great Oldenbarneveldt, and of the renowned Van Groot."

"My good old tutor, Mr. Butharwick, will hasten

to pay his respect to Doctor Goel. He calls Grotius the second and greater Erasmus, lamp-bearer of learning, the glory of Europe, and I know not what besides."

Mistress Goel turned to her father, and spoke to him in their own tongue, mighty well pleased, as I guessed, to tell him that an admirer of his friend lived so near. The doctor drew himself up in his chair, his wrinkled face transfigured by a radiant smile. His daughter continued—

"My father's enemies, envious of his learning and repute, laid accusation against him of being privy to the conspiracy to murder Prince Maurice. He was thrown into prison at the same time as his friend. Not to prolong my tale to tedious length, he escaped to France. We left Paris three months ago for London, where he met an old acquaintance, Vermuijden by name, who is about to begin great drainage-works in this part of the country, as you probably know."

"He *was* about to do so," I answered; "but the scheme has come to nothing. The highest court of law in England has made void the King's grant to Vermuijden."

"A court of law has annulled a royal decree!" she exclaimed.

"It is even so," I replied. "The laws of England are not to be overridden at the King's will."

Hereupon followed much converse between father and daughter, of which I made out no more than that they were greatly astonished and in

doubt, as if my news had deeply concerned themselves.

Their colloquy ended, Mistress Goel asked me many questions, prompted by the doctor, respecting the rights of the Commoners and their opposition to the drainage of the Isle, repeating my answers to her father, who seemed much disquieted thereby. Hitherto, he had believed that the scheme met with favour from all the inhabitants, excepting some few of the baser sort, and I gathered that he had invested money in the purchase of shares in an undertaking which he supposed to be of unquestioned public advantage, and likely to yield no small gain to the participants.

His anxiety was somewhat relieved when he heard that the Commoners had no rights in the King's Chace at Hatfield, which formed part of the area under Vermuijden's plan.

Suddenly remembering that I had overstaid the limits of decorum and of kindness, Mistress Goel suffering as she must be, I rose to take leave.

"You will not forget to bring your friend to see my father," said she, flushing a little, or so I fancied.

As I withdrew into the common room, Lord Sheffield entered by the front door, and gave order in his imperious style to the obsequious hostess that his presence should be signified to Doctor Goel. He and I exchanged the distant bow of ceremony, for there was no love lost between us two. His ten-years younger brother, Edmund,

and I had been dear comrades until Edmund's death; and, indeed, my hatred of the elder grew out of my love for the younger, to whom my Lord Sheffield behaved ever with bitterness and cruelty. Not caring to remain in the same room with "my Lord Arrogancy," as we of the Isle were wont to call him, I went out into the yard to bid Mat bring my horse, and, as Mat had many questions to ask concerning the treatment of the fawn, some time passed before Trueboy was led out of stable. Just as I lifted foot to stirrup, his lordship came out of the back door, toying with his sword. It was one of his whims, or part of his cowardice, never to go unarmed.

"You have a good horse, Master Frank," said he.

I nodded, knowing that he had not come out to praise my horse.

"If you should want a purchaser for him, I would make you a bid," he continued.

"I have no present purpose of selling him," I replied.

"No immediate purpose, but when your father has flung away his patrimony in suits at law against the King, you may be glad to know of a buyer, who will give you your price."

"When that event befalls, I will remember your lordship's promise."

"Do. My friends, Doctor Goel and his fair daughter, tell me you have been exceedingly kind in bribing a rabble crew to call off their dogs from

the lady. Pray accept my thanks. It will give you comfort to know that she will not again be exposed to annoyance by the scoundrels of the neighbourhood. To-morrow they remove to our poor castle of Butterwick."

I bowed an acknowledgment of his information, mounted, and rode away. A heedless rider I was, leaving Trueboy to choose the manner of our going. I saw nothing but, now the pale face with steadfast look confronting the threatening crowd, now the face aflush with tender pity, now the arch-light in the brown eyes as she talked with me in the room. And this was one of our invaders! A conquering invader, right surely! A Dutchwoman! Nay, an angel!

How flowingly and trippingly she spoke our English tongue! How divinely she endured her pain! How daintily she mingled raillery and sweetness! No such woman had ever lived on earth before. And one day she could call me Frank, and be my own. Some foreboding that my father and I might be divided by my love, I felt, but none the less determined that she should be mine. That sneering villain, Sheffield, had marked her as his prey, but I had no fear of him. She would know him for the libertine and coward that he was. Why had he told me that to-morrow she would be removed to his father's house? Ten to one, he lied to me, perhaps that he might hinder me from going to the White Hart again. Ha, ha, what a thrice sodden fool to think *that!* Or

it might be that he had some other mischief in his head. Whatever it might be, I would be too strong for him.

For all the way I rode there rang in my ears to the sweetest tune, "You will not forget to bring your friend to see my father." No, I should not forget. To-morrow, early, I would bring my friend.

How long, long ago is it since that bright day of May? And I remember all I felt, and thought better than I remember yesterday.

Chapter II

ON the morrow I appeared at breakfast in silken stockings, new doublet and hose, new shoes, with roses and strings of the latest fashion, Flemish ruff and cuffs, and cloak of tawny velvet. My man, Luke Barnby, stared at my gaudy apparel; and, when I bade him have Trueboy and the old, white mare at the door within half an hour, and to bring me my Milanese rapier, he answered surlily—

"Which 'tis the first time I've heard of otter-hunting with swords, or in Sunday clothes."

I had clean forgotten the big otter hunt! This spring the otters were more numerous than any man remembered them, and they were making havoc among the salmon in Trent. This was the day appointed for the meet at Temple Belwood, when all Belton and Beltoft were to assemble and make a great riddance of the vermin. And I, the host and master of the hunt, had clean forgotten the business! To fail to be at my post would raise an outcry among our neighbours, and might bring me severe censure from my father, but to postpone the visit to Doctor and Mistress Goel was not to be thought of. I had my doubts whether the young lady could be removed so soon as Sheffield had threatened; but there was a

chance that it might happen, and then farewell to the hope of seeing her for Heaven only knew how long. That was unendurable, so I wrote a few lines to a neighbour, begging him to assume my place, and not to spare the Temple ale or wine-cellar.

"Hark ye, Luke," said I; "put this into the hands of Squire Mell, of Beltoft, with haste. Mr. Butharwick and I have pressing business at Crowle."

When Mr. Butharwick and I sat down to breakfast, he to his usual mess of hot barley-water, sweetened with sugar and thickened with bread—he having no stomach of a morning for steak and ale, and marrow-pudding he abhorred—I saw that he had something on his mind, and was in no such jovial humour as last evening, when he had been joyous in prospect of meeting a scholar and a friend of his idolized Grotius. At last he broke silence with—

"Frank, it will be wise to defer this visit to Crowle. The town is ruled by Scorpio, and in thy horoscope Scorpio was occupied by Mars in affliction. To-day a malefic is transiting the place of Mars."

"Terms of art are thrown away on me," I answered. "Who should know that so well as you?"

"Crowle is always unlucky for you," said Mr. Butharwick.

"Truly, my horse once fell there, and once I

came to disgrace for snoring under a sermon by Uncle Graves; but other mischance I cannot remember. Yet I have gone thither—how many? say, a thousand times."

"Do not jest with the Heavens, boy," said Mr. Butharwick, sternly.

And, indeed, at any other time I should have been far from jesting, for my tutor was marvellously skilled in astrology, but this day the longing to see Mistress Goel's bright face made me defiant of the stars. Mindful, however, that my good tutor had been rereading my horoscope, and anew consulting the heavens on my behalf, I replied—

"Pardon me, but the worst luck that could befall me at Crowle to-day would be to find that Doctor Goel and his daughter had left the place before we arrived. And we are to keep our word, are we not, though the stars be never so unfavourable?"

In the end Mr. Butharwick was persuaded much against his will to countenance our going, but not until I had put on my topaz ring, and engaged to use the prayer appointed for Times of War and Tumult. Assuredly, no prince of the blood had ever more fonder faithful counsellor than I in my tutor, but I chafed much at his delay and over great precaution.

The old mare was covered with foam when we drew rein at the inn door, and her rider fain to be out of saddle, for Mr. Butharwick was no keen

horseman. The hostess led us into her best room, where the doctor received us with distant stateliness, and his daughter with sweet courtesy. After introduction of Mr. Butharwick I left the clerkly men to entertain themselves, which they were well able to do, having Latin for their common tongue, and, as it seemed by the noise they made, an infinite deal to say to each other.

I had thought Mistress Goel lovely when she was in pain and disarray, and her form partly hidden by the long cloak she wore on our first meeting; but now, wearing a gown which fitted her slim body closely to the waist, with her shining brown hair neatly coiled and folded, and in ease and gaiety of heart, as her pleasant smiling showed, I thought—no, I did not think, I was overcome with love and felt that all the high fantastic words and deeds of lovers, at which I had laughed hitherto, were too tame for the height of my passion and worship. When I found my tongue, I asked particularly of her health.

"My hurts are healed, or will soon be healed," she assured me. "Leyden is famous for its leechcraft, and my father is—or was—the best physician there. We go to-day to Castle Mulgrave."

"But you cannot ride so far," I objected.

"We are to be carried in a litter, which the earl sends for us."

The old nobleman had, I then remembered, a litter in which he was conveyed about the Isle when gout forbade horsemanship.

"You know the earl?" I asked.

"He did us the honour to pay us some attention, when we were in London."

I wondered what might underlie this, for the earl was one of the proudest men in England, and not likely to care for the sorrows of an exiled doctor.

"Did you make the acquaintance of Lord Sheffield in town?" I asked.

"Yes; he had the condescension to be our cicerone there."

The tone in which Mistress Goel pronounced the word "condescension" had soothing for my jealousy.

"How long do you remain at Castle Mulgrave?" I asked.

"I do not know; perhaps until Mynherr Vermuijden appears. We go because Lord Sheffield has alarmed my father, warning him of danger in our continuing here. And our hostess is relieved of some strange uneasiness by our going."

My mind was filled with apprehension, which I could not express. That Sheffield should do an act of pure kindness was incredible. His foul pursuit of beauty was a byword in the Isle, and there were fathers, brothers, and lovers, who were held back from murderous revenge only by terror of the old earl, who had long been President of the Council of the North, and consequently held unlimited authority over the common people of Axholme. Even that fear might not have restrained

some, but Sheffield, as I have said, always went armed and attended, and had a host of spies in his pay. But how could I speak of Sheffield's vileness to this maiden shining in her purity?

The door flew open, and Dame Hind announced: "His lordship, my lord Sheffield." From the plumes in his beaver, fastened with glistering stones, to his riding boots, richly lined with lace, he was dressed with splendour. The courtly grace with which he doffed his hat and bowed filled me with envy. When he had saluted Mistress Goel and her father, he told them that the litter awaited their pleasure, and then greeted me with affected surprise.

"I' faith, Master Frank, I took you for some London gallant. One is used to meet you ready for the chase. Vavasour is a mighty hunter, you must know," said he to Mistress Goel. "He hath no fellow in the art of cutting a stag's throat, or spearing an otter."

Noting the slight shudder of disgust, which he had caused by so artfully discommending me, he went on—

"In the Netherlands you have pastimes more refined than our English sports. I say 'our,' though I take no pleasure in them."

"It is true you are no hunter, but you are a skilful trapper, my lord: cunning in bait and lure and bird-call," I answered.

One glance at Sheffield's face, white with rage, showed Mistress Goel that more was meant than

met the ear. She stepped back nearer to the two old men, who were so deep in some question of learning that they were loth to part, and oblivious of every thing but their disputation.

"You cowardly cur," said Sheffield. "You know that you are safe from horse-whip in this presence."

"Safe from horse-whip anywhere in your hand, unless you had four or five to help you."

Threat and defiance passed in whisper almost, but our looks were fierce enough, as we stood close together, eyes pretty nearly level, for Sheffield had not more than an inch advantage over my five feet ten. He was the first to recover himself, saying—

"Your ill-timed jests would provoke a Stoic."

Then he turned to Doctor Goel, who had suddenly become aware that he detained his lordship and his train unseemlily, and a movement was made. Not until the lady and her father were in the litter, borne on the shoulders of four stout fellows in the Mulgrave livery, and the escort mounted and ready to set off, had I speech with Mistress Goel, and that no more than formal leave-taking, save that when her little hand lay for a moment in my big paw, I touched it lightly with my li She withdrew it quickly, but I saw no displeasure in her eyes. Sheffield put his blackamoor in charge of the litter and its attendants, and promising to overtake the party speedily, rode with two of his men in the opposite direction.

Mr. Butharwick and I re-entered the inn, a dull hole now, that had been lately so bright, and called for a cup of wine, which Dame Hind brought us, and, setting hands on hips, gave vent to her feelings.

"The ease it is to my mind that they are gone, nobody knows. No more foreign mounseers and madams for the White Hart. Good English meat they wouldn't have; but she makes a mess with eggs and scraps—pudding you couldn't call it. And he gathers dandelion and dock-cress and goosefoot, and the like o' that, which she cooks 'em, or he mixes 'em wi' oil, and eats 'em raw. It turned my stomach to see it. And their manners wasn't English. Too civil by half. 'If you please,' and 'May I trouble you?' and 'Would you be so good?' whenever she wanted anything. Didn't grumble or make a fuss about the reckoning—that I will say for her. Then their jabber-jabber between themselves! It give me the creeps to hear 'em. Such a clat as he made wi' dirt, and stones, and weeds, and rubbish, which schoolmaster says wizards and witches always do; and he had a big book full of gipsy-marks, which young madam called his brewing Bible; and, believe me or believe me not, he read it back'ards way, as 'tis well known witches do read the Lord's Prayer so, when they want to raise the devil. Schoolmaster he says they are both deep in witchcraft, and young madam worse than the old mounseer, for all her prettiness and her smooth-spoken ways.

And certain sure it is that she gave Mat something to drink that cured him of the ague quicker than ever he was cured afore."

As soon as Dame Hind paused for breath, Mr. Butharwick reproved her. Doctor Goel, he assured her, was a man of great learning, of perfect integrity, and the intimate friend of the best and greatest man in the world.

I broke in, hotly indignant that Mistress Goel should be accused of so foul a crime. We might have spared our breath, for the hostess replied by shaking her head sorrowfully, and declaring her assurance that we were both bewitched. So saying, she swung out of the room, and left us to our wine. I had tried to remove the suspicion of the woman, gross and ignorant though she was, fearing that her tongue might work mischief, and now began to pluck some comfort out of the removal of my lady to Castle Mulgrave, where she would be in safety from the fury of folk always ruthless against one believed to be guilty of witchcraft.

It is no wonder that the people should be fierce against those who ally themselves with the enemy of mankind, but their terror often blinds them to evident tokens of innocence, and I cannot but be afraid that many persons have suffered torture and death who were falsely accused of the monstrous wickedness. Perhaps I have been led to think so only because the crime was laid to the charge of one so pure and kind as Mistress Goel.

Before the day of my coming of age the Isle was

in great commotion, for a large fleet had sailed up the Don, bringing an army of Walloons and Dutchmen with stores of timber, and tools, and weapons, and machines unknown to us Islonians. The invaders had their headquarters at Sandtoft, where Vermuijden set about the building of houses and the erection of fortifications, keeping relays of workmen busy day and night. How to reconcile these doings with the letter received from my father I could not in the least understand, but I took credit to myself for keeping silence concerning the decision of the court in my father's favour. That was far from being my father's opinion, when he arrived on the Friday evening, and learned that Vermuijden had already begun his operations.

"Thou foolish lad!" he broke out. "Should'st have ridden through the whole Isle, and set every hamlet aglow with bonfires and shouting for joy. And would'st have done it but for scraping acquaintance with that old rascal and his daughter at the White Hart. Hast lost thy five wits? What devil possessed thee to miss the otter-hunt, and to annoy our neighbours and shame thy father? Befriending the refugee, conspirator, assassin, when should'st have been heartening our people! And that dotard Butharwick with thee! He shall pack out of my house."

This explosion astounded me, for my father, though of warm temper in private (in public no man had more self-control), did not often use such fiery language to me; but I answered sulkily—

"I am sorry to have angered you, sir, by what I supposed was discretion."

"Discretion!" he almost shouted. "Would that you had the smallest tincture of the quality! Is it discreet, think you, to parley with the enemy of your father and your country, betraying God only knows what to the sly old Dutchman?"

"A most inoffensive old gentleman," I answered. "A simple scholar, who has been duped by Vermuijden."

My father laughed bitterly. "You simpleton! Does Mulgrave make much of 'simple scholars' and entertain them?"

As I believed, Earl Mulgrave cared little or nothing about Doctor Goel, while Sheffield, I felt sure, cared much about the doctor's daughter, but this was not the time to offer my father an explanation, which would bring in the name of Mistress Goel, so I left him to digest his wrath, and sought Mr. Butharwick. I found him in much affliction, for to hurt or offend his friend and patron was very grievous to him. He blamed himself alone for all the mischief, and he reminded me that my father had had a weary sojourn in London, and after infinite trouble and pains had won his cause, only to find on his return home that all his labour and expenditure had been rendered null and void.

"What wonder, Frank," said the good old soul, "that thy father should be angry, even if not quite justly angry, that nothing has been made known

of his triumph in the courts? What wonder that he should be incensed at our making friends with those who, he believes, are in the counsel of his enemies, and whom he has seen caressed by the crafty earl? We are in fault, or rather, I am in fault, for I ought to have guided thee more wisely. I, at least, ought to have been sure that the stars of heaven cannot lie."

This womanish babble did not soothe my ruffled temper, as I told Mr. Butharwick, rudely enough. My father had treated me with indignity and injustice, and I did well to be angry. So I went for a stroll in the park, seeking consolation in solitary communion with Nature, where it has seldom failed me. Nor did it fail me now. Sauntering under the dense shadows of the old trees, or out in the dim stillness of the open sward, startling browsing or drowsing beasts, which showed as dusky shapes for a moment, and then vanished in the dark, I grew quiet; and when I gained the highest ground and saw the low moon and her long reflection on the broad expanse of water, I was filled with confidence that my own prospect was as bright and boundless as the scene on which I looked.

I turned at the sound of footsteps, and recognised my father.

"The cool night air is good for hot heads, young or old," he said. And we walked homeward together.

Chapter III

MY good comrade, Dick Portington, was the first of our guests to arrive at Temple on the 28th of May, and he brought me as birthday gift a gun such as I had not before seen, the cock containing a flint, which, as it fell, struck sparks from the cover of the pan, and at the same moment forced back the cover so that the sparks flew on the priming. The action was far quicker than that of the matchlock, and much surer than the wheel-lock guns which I had hitherto handled, and I had great pleasure in it, and a brace of pistols made after the same pattern.

"'Tis the rarest present, Dick," I said, "but you shame me. Another gift! And I have never given you anything."

"Say nothing of that, man," answered he. "I am older than thou, and the squire is free with his money. I have what I want for the asking. Besides, to-day you come to riches, and may spend and give as you like."

Dick's allusion was to an understanding between my father and me, that when I came of age certain properties in Beltoft, which were part of my mother's dower, should be made over to me. I had freely spoken of this to my friend, and in truth, looked forward eagerly to the enjoyment of

means of my own, for my father had allowed me less money than men of his rank were accustomed to allow their sons. He was no niggard in providing me things suitable to our station, but I had never much money in my purse, so that I held aloof from companionship with other young fellows except Dick, who knew my plight, and often listened to my talk of the brave doings which were to follow my possession of an estate of some ninety pounds a year. To-day we had scant opportunity for conversation, as our humbler neighbours came early, with full intent to enjoy merry pastimes and good cheer; nor were the gentry and farmers late, since all were keenly expectant of news and advice from their "Solicitor." Ladies and gentlemen on horseback, a few ladies who preferred dignity in a jolting coach to ease in the saddle, farmers' wives on pillion behind their husbands, labourers, marshmen, and fowlers, with their women-folk, afoot, made the spacious park a lively scene. Our stables were soon filled, and many horses had to be tethered in the paddock. By good luck, the day was cloudless, and the wind soft, almost still.

Our guests betook them to various sports until dinner-time. The great bowling-green was crowded with jostling, laughing bowlers; the archery ground afforded amusement to many competitors, for our Islonians are skilful in the use of the long-bow and cross-bow; parties were gathered for cricket, balloon, quoits, nine-pins, and leaping the bar. Some of the lads and lasses began at once to trip

it to fiddle and pipe and tabour. Many of the older folk were content to stand or sit and watch a set of morris dancers, or filled the booth where a company of strolling players performed a blood-curdling tragedy and a side-splitting farce well within the hour. A group surrounded Bet Boswell, a gypsy lass, whom our Beltonians knew from the long stay which her tribe had made with us, and more than one young farmer had fallen over head and ears in love with her. She was a tall, lithe creature, boldly handsome, with that roguish look in her dark eyes which passes away with the coming of Love. To-day she told fortunes by the palm and with the crystal. As Dick and I joined the group, the moonstruck gaping of some of the rustics proved that Bet was doing her business skilfully.

"Here be young squire," said one. "Tell him his fortune."

The rest echoed the fellow, and falling in with their humour, I said—

"Come then, Bess. Let me hear my fate;" offering her sixpence.

"Not now," she answered, refusing the coin with a wave of her hand. "Your destiny trembles in the balance to-day."

"How so, oracular sybil?" I asked, laughing, but a little impressed by the gravity of her look and tone.

"Before you sleep, you will lose a fortune, and be offered another," she said.

"How I can lose what I have not, I do not understand," I replied; "but of a certainty I shall take one, if it be offered me."

"If you are wise, you will," said Bess, and turned from me as having no more to say.

At the instant, the ringing of a bell and blowing of a horn called those of our guests to dinner who were to take their repast under tents and awnings in the park, and I joined my father to make the round of the tables, where huge joints of beef and mutton, piles of Trent salmon and larded capons, and the like substantial viands, were rapidly disappearing, washed down with copious draughts of strong October, to which were added for the yeomen farmers brandy, wine, mead, and aqua vitæ.

When we had seen that all were faring merrily, and had nodded and smiled acknowledgment of the cheers for "the Solicitor," and for "the heir of Temple Belwood," we joined the company assembling in the hall, and thence with proper ceremony to the ancient dining-room. There the talk ran on Vermuijden and his doings much more than on the rightful hero of the day, and voices rose and tongues wagged faster and faster as the men's glasses were replenished with wine of Burgundy, or Bourdeaux, or Champaign, and the women sipped hock and Bacharach and sherris.

My left-hand neighbour at table was Mistress Emma Ryther, a buxom girl, with great ox-eyes that never changed. She was accounted one of the beauties of the Isle, and indeed as a piece of

flesh and blood she was pretty enough. I scarcely knew whether I liked or misliked her, for her manner to me seemed to betoken that she expected me to whistle, and was ready to come. Perhaps there would have been no more than a toss-up between liking and misliking, since I had that conceit in my head, if I had never seen the divine beauty which shines from the soul. Having seen that, Mistress Ryther was to me but a well-painted figure in porcelain. While she babbled nothings to me, I wondered that I could ever have thought otherwise of her than I did to-day. Some perception of my state of mind she showed by saying tartly: "Your head is as full of the Dutch as everybody's."

When dessert was spread, to my astonishment, Mr. Ryther rose to propose the toast of the day. He was not an old friend, or a person of consideration. Some dozen years ago he had been so lucky as to inherit unexpected wealth, and ever since he had devoted himself to increasing his riches, chiefly by lending money on mortgage, and taking every legal advantage of the necessitous borrower. He was a biggish fellow, with a loud voice and pompous manner, and a great hooked nose, which my fingers itched to pull for his impudence. My impatience grew as he went on to speak, lauding my father's public spirit and generosity, taking a tone as if he were the equal of Thomas Vavasour. When he began to talk of me my blood boiled, for he enumerated my good points as though I had

been a horse, and he had the selling of me. He wound up by saying that he looked forward to the festivities to come, when the heir of Temple Belwood should bring a beautiful and well-dowered bride to this ancient house. I could have hurled a decanter at the greasy forehead, which he wiped with infinite complacency. I stammered through as much as I could remember of the little speech which I had conned for the occasion, saying as little as might be of the proposer. The ladies withdrew, and the real business of the day began. My father rose to give an account of his proceedings in London, which need not be set down here, as I have put it on record elsewhere. He ended by saying: "The highest court of law in this country has given judgment against Vermuijden, but he continues his illegal action. Persons near to his Majesty have assured the Dutchman of royal protection, and dare to set the King's prerogative above the law. That assertion of prerogative is baseless, and I confidently expect that it will be soon withdrawn. Parliament is at this moment, as you know, taking steps to remove an injurious adviser from the position of authority which he has shamelessly abused. On the removal of the Duke of Buckingham from the counsels of his Majesty, there will doubtless be a change of policy on the part of a nobleman, our neighbour, who has hitherto upheld the Dutchmen in their invasion of our Isle, and the law will prevail. We must not forget that Vermuijden believes that he is in his right,

nor that he has paid a very large sum of money for his supposed rights in our soil. We must proceed with strict legality, or we shall put ourselves in the wrong. Allow me to make a personal appeal to every gentleman in this room. I have given my time and strength and means freely to your service, and I beg that my efforts may not be frustrated by resort to violence of any kind. Let us adhere to the lawful course, and we shall most assuredly be successful in the end."

As my father sat down there was some applause, and a few gentlemen shouted, "Long life to our Solicitor;" but murmurs were heard in several quarters, and Squire Portington, of Thorne, rose to speak.

"Gentlemen," said he, "law and order are all very well, but what about our property? A hundred acres of my best land is under water now through the tomfoolery of these damned Dutchmen. If they go on, they'll drown me and my nearest neighbours out and out. Mighty small consolation it will be to us, if some fine day this Vermuijden has to bow to the law. That won't give us back our farms and our houses. The Law is on our side, but force has the upper hand of the Law. As for Parliament making an end of Buckingham, for anything I can see, he is just as likely to make an end of Parliament. Do you know that the Dutchman swears he has full power to hang anybody who resists him, and has set up a gallows at Sandtoft? It is a fact, gentlemen. We have

tasted Prerogative in demand for money which Parliament refused to vote. Prerogative means——"

The gentlemen on either side of Squire Portington dragged him down to his seat, but the squire shook himself free, and got on his legs again.

"My neighbours here are afraid that I shall be brought before the Council of the North for talking treason, and bring them into trouble for listening to it. I didn't suppose that there were any damned spies and informers here. I was saying that the law can't do anything to save us from ruin. So much the worse for the law. But I'm not going to sit quiet while the Dutchmen drown my land and me. My motto is 'Liberty and Property.' If the gentlemen here, or half of 'em, will join me, we'll send Vermuijden three days' notice to quit our land. Of course, he won't take it, but that's his affair. After the three days have expired, we'll go with five hundred stout fellows, and drive the beggars out, kill every man who resists, hang Vermuijden on his own gallows, and sweep the Isle clean of the invaders. That's my way. We will talk of law and order when we have made sure of our liberty and property."

All the young men present, and a number of their elders, rose to their feet, and shouted, "That's sense! Liberty and property! Three cheers for Squire Portington! Send the Dutchmen to the devil! Hang Vermuijden on his own gallows! There's Scripture for it. Hurrah!"

These and similar cries made a deafening hub-

bub. Filled with wine, and stirred by Portington's harangue, our guests forgot decorum entirely, and made such a tumult as encouraged the common sort to crowd about the doorway, and add their voices to the cheers for "Liberty and Property" and the cry of "Down with the Dutch."

Conspicuous among the intruders was Boswell, the father of the girl above mentioned, a notorious poacher, and worse. He had edged far into the room and struck me as being all eyes and ears. I sprang to my feet, and bade the rabble clear out, which they did pretty quickly. My father seized the opportunity afforded by the slight lull which followed to dissuade his friends from violence; declaring that if there was not good prospect of remedy by lawful means within three months, he himself would lead in defence of our just and legal rights by the strong hand.

The pledge was hailed with loud shouts of approval and the draining of many glasses in his honour; but there ensued a great buzz of talk, during which men left their seats to be within earshot of this or that speaker, so that the company broke up into separate knots, some listening to the one they took for an oracle, others talking all at once, and hearkening only to the sound of their own voices. There was an end of all orderly counsel for that time.

Late in the evening, when the festivities were over, and the guests departed, my father explained that the reason why he had not handed me the

deeds of the Beltoft land was that he had been compelled to mortgage it, owing to his outlay in defence of the rights of the Isle Commoners. I answered that I thought it hard my little property should have been chosen to bear the costs of litigation; some other portion of the estate might have borne them. Whereupon my father amazed and confounded me by saying that more than half the lands of Temple Belwood were already mortgaged. For some time I was dumb with astonishment, and stood staring. At length I burst out—

"Why should our estate bear all the cost of these proceedings? Surely every Commoner ought to pay his share."

"Thou art somewhat hasty, Frank," my father replied, "to call Temple Belwood *our* estate. If I chose to spend in defence of the rights of the Islonians, my son has no authority to call me to account."

"Is it your pleasure," I asked, "that I should go to the plough-tail to-morrow?"

"Don't talk like a fool, boy."

"I became a man to-day, sir."

"Discretion limps behind old Father Time, it seems."

I suppressed the easy retort, and my father continued—

"If you have not your father's public mind, I am sorry; but your private interests are safe enough, and Temple Belwood will be yours without encumbrance on a single acre."

Again I was amazed and mute.

"Ryther is engaged to return the deeds to you on the day you wed his daughter."

Now I understood mysteries; Ryther's insolence at dinner, for one, and his daughter's manner, for another. My father had squandered money in a business which was no more his than that of any gentleman in the Isle, assured that all damage to the estate would be repaired by this absurd covenant of marriage. The Vavasour patrimony was lost, and all the ceremony and merrymaking of the day had been in honour of the heir of—Nothing.

The state of things was maddening and yet laughable, and laughter would have its way. I shook with it.

"What in the world is there to laugh at?" shouted my father.

"God knows, I don't," I answered, still laughing.

It was my father's turn to be astonished. He gazed doubtfully at me until my fit was over. Then he said—

"You have taken too much wine. We will speak of this business when sleep has sobered you." And he went off to bed.

I was coward enough to be glad of the respite, foreseeing that my father's grief and anger would be hard to bear, when he knew that I would wed no woman on earth but Anna Goel.

Chapter IV

I COULD not now set down all that passed between my father and me on the marriage, which he designed for me; nor would I, if I could, for I said much that even to-day makes my ears burn to remember, and he some things which are better forgotten. I believe he was the hotter with me that he did not in his heart like the alliance which he proposed, and was obliged to do violence to his own feelings in urging it upon me. We ended in anger, and were estranged the one from the other. For some time we did not feel the full painfulness of this, by reason of my father's occupation with the affairs of the Isle, which took him much abroad, and brought many visitors and messengers to Temple Belwood when he was at home.

While he was busied with these matters, I haunted the neighbourhood of Castle Mulgrave in hope of chance encounter with Mistress Goel. The distance between the two houses was not much more than three miles. Sometimes I rowed my boat down the Nolffdyke, and so into Trent, when I hoisted sail, and beat up and down the river on the look-out for the earl's pleasure barge. At other times I rode by the causey which crossed the marsh extending from Beltoft to the Butterwick ferry, and scoured the roads and lanes on the

other side of the river. My quest brought me but one glimpse of my lady. Once, as I gained a slight eminence on the eastern bank, I saw her with a party entering the courtyard of the castle —on horseback! She had learned to ride since I had last spoken with her, and I ground my teeth thinking of who had taught her, and of the mounting and dismounting, and all the occasions which the tutor had to touch hand and foot, even it might be to take her in his arms. How I hated Sheffield! And, for the time, I almost hated Mistress Goel, too.

The day after this maddening sight, Dick Portington came to Temple with news which at another time would have mightily stirred me. Hatfield Chace was to be disparked. The deer were to be driven and caught, to be taken away and distributed in other of the royal forests. When the Chace had been cleared, Vermuijden might fell timber, drain off the waters, and allot the land.

"No more winding of the horn, no more following of the deer, my boy," said Dick. "We ought to see the last stag hunt in Hatfield. And there may be other sport besides the driving of the deer. So come along."

"What manner of sport?" I asked.

"You know how many of our fellows in Thorne and Crowle reckon the Chace as much their domain as the King's. They are not over well-pleased to lose their venison, or their pastime. Moonlight nights will be dull when there's no

more stalking of the King's game, or chance to warm one's blood in a fight with his keepers."

"You speak feelingly, Dick," said I, laughing.

"Ay, that do I," he answered. "But the fowlers and fishers take it worse than I do. A fat buck once in a while is worth much to a poor man. There will be sullen faces looking on to-day."

"But the foresters will be too strong for assault," I replied.

"May be so. But hark you, boy, Vermuijden and some of his people are to meet a party from old Mulligrubs' to-day at the Crown, the more fools they."

This news set my pulse going. What so likely as that Doctor Goel and his daughter would be present at a meeting between the earl (whom it was Dick's whim to misname Mulligrubs) and the Dutch leader? And if there should be trouble brewing, the more reason that a friend should be at hand. So I answered—

"Have with you, then!"

But there was not a horse in the stable at the time, except the old white mare. Luke had ridden Trueboy to Haxey, and the rest were galloping on my father's errands. When I said so to Dick, he answered—

"Why wait for a horse? Get stilts for us both, and we'll cross the marsh to Messic Mere, and take one of Holmes's boats. With this wind we can fly up Idle as fast we we could ride round."

So we did. Walking to Belshaw, we mounted

our stilts there, and were quickly across the fen. The long, dry weather had made it passable for those who knew the shallows and the lie of the ridges, if they had skill with the stilts, and few Islonians had more than Portington and I. We took boat at Holmes's, and then sped up the river merrily, Dick with the sheet in his hand, I steering. It was right pleasant going, with the wind rustling and whistling among the reeds on either bank, the water hissing and rippling from the prow, as we wound along narrow lanes of water, and out into wide spaces where the fowls, startled by our coming, made off, flapping and screaming, or scuttled in among the sedges and bulrushes. One never has the feeling of being away and apart from the rest of the world, I think, quite so much anywhere else as in lonely water-ways, and we two sat silently enjoying the quiet of the scene for a while. At length Dick spoke—

"D'ye know, Frank, that it is part of Vermuijden's scheme to stop the Idle?"

"I don't take," I answered.

"He plans to cut off the river at the Nottingham border—has begun cutting the drain which is to turn the water into Trent."

"Is he empowered to pull down churches that he may use the stones to embank his drains?" I asked; for to me it appeared sacrilege to dry up our rivers and streams.

"Doubtless he might do that, if he would pay money enough into the empty exchequer," replied

Dick; "and for a trifle more he might have royal authority to dig up our ancestors' bones, and burn them for the lime he could get out of 'em."

Before we reached Tudworth, Squire Portington's place, a noise in the distance told us that the driving of the deer had begun; and, as soon as might be, we were in the saddle and on our way into the forest, guided by the sound of shouting men and barking dogs. For some time we rode on, neither meeting nor seeing any one. The course of the drivers seemed to be winding away from us. Suddenly, as we emerged from the shadow of a thickish grove, we saw in the open before us a doe and her fawn standing in a stream, drinking. Behind them were some of the finest oaks in the Chace, magnificent in the splendour of mid-June foliage. My friend drew rein, and cursed all Dutchmen with a vehemence that might have provoked laughter from a cooler companion.

"Think of it, Frank," he said. "Not a buck to be left! These trees to be cut down! No more music of hound and horn!"

How long Dick might have cursed and lamented, I know not, but for the coming of a verderer, who told us that the beaters had orders to drive toward Thorne Mere, and that we had best ride in that direction, if we desired to see the taking of the deer. So we hastened northward instead of following the army of keepers, and made for the rising ground above the mere, where we found a great crowd of gentle and simple already gathered.

In a short time an immense herd burst from the covert of the wood, followed by a multitude of men and dogs. Nearly all the deer took to the water, and then were pursued by a hundred or more boats. A few took refuge on islets here and there, and some swam right across the mere, but far the greatest number huddled together, terrified and exhausted, in water up to their necks. The fellows in the boats surrounded the little forest of horns, and some ventured amongst them, and tying a strong, long rope to their heads, dragged them to land, and bundled them into carts, or tethered them for ease of driving whither they were to be handed over to the keepers of other forests. To me it was a sorry sight, and one of which I soon tired. So, leaving Dick with some of his cronies, and a promise to meet at the Crown in a couple of hours' time, I made my way at once to the inn, in hope to glean some knowledge from the people there of the company expected.

Turning a sharp corner of the lane pretty quickly, I almost ran over a lady coming along the causey in the opposite direction. As I drew up, I perceived that it was Mistress Goel. There was a little difficulty in forcing my steed into the wide ditch; but that done, I dismounted, and made my salutation, saying something of my pleasure in meeting her.

"My pleasure was somewhat dashed by fear of being knocked down," said she. "Is it customary

in this country for horsemen to keep the path, and drive foot passengers into the ditch?"

"Your riding-master must have taught you so much," I answered.

"And how come you to know I have had lessons?"

"By seeing how well you ride."

The lady made me a little bow. I thought I read a question in her eyes, but it did not pass her lips.

"May I accompany you to—wherever you are going?" I inquired.

"I shall be glad of your guidance. I came out to breathe the air only. There is an hour to be passed before we leave, and the inn is crowded and noisy."

During that hour I learned several things, which I will set down briefly. It had been reported at Castle Mulgrave that my father had vowed to expel the Dutch by force, that a quantity of new firearms had been bought and stored at Temple for the purpose, and that an attack on the settlement was to take place immediately. The earl had informed the King of this (supposed) state of affairs, and had received promise of indemnity for any action he might see fit to take in defence of the foreigners, and been empowered to arrest, imprison, or to question suspected persons. Doctor Goel had been warned of the danger of removal to Sandtoft, but had preferred, for some reason not given to me, to run the risk rather than prolong

his stay at the castle. As the doctor proved unmovable on this point, the earl had ordered an armed escort to attend him and his daughter to Thorne, and had advised Vermuijden to bring a strong company to meet them.

Here was much food for reflection, but the pressing business was to prevent mischief now and here. Was it purely by forgetfulness, I wondered, that the earl had appointed to-day, when hundreds of the Islonians were present for the driving of the deer, and might be provoked to riot by seeing a body of foreigners bearing arms.

On our way back to the Crown, Mistress Goel asked—

"Could you persuade your father to meet Mynherr Vermuijden? Surely they two, desiring only what is just and right, might come to a good understanding. There are those who seek to inflame the trouble, I know, and I tremble to think of what may come. Could you persuade Mr. Vavasour?"

I laughed, rather bitterly. "Unluckily, my father would not listen to me."

"I gathered from what you told me that you were as happy as father and son can be."

"So we were, but there is division between us now."

"Not on our account, I hope!"

"Nay, it is but a family quarrel of an ancient pattern."

No more passed, for we were at the inn; a long,

low house, with a green in front, where some scores of men sat or sprawled, drinking ale and loud in talk, but keeping a watchful eye on the doings at the tavern. Two dozen men, or thereabout, in the Mulgrave colours, armed with muskets and cutlasses, stood near the porch; an equal number of Dutchmen, pistols in belt and gun in hand, sat on empty barrels, pails turned bottom upward, hen-coops, anything. The Islonians on the green were for the most part unarmed, except for the staff and big knife, without which our men never stir from home, but here and there a cross-bow was to be seen. Within the house, at one of the open windows, sat several young fellows of my acquaintance, Dick Portington among them, merry over their wine. No likelihood of disturbance, thought I, the crowd being in good humour, and the Mulgrave retinue and the Dutch having such advantage in the matter of weapons. But as Mistress Goel disappeared within the doorway, and I turned to lead my horse to the stable, two of the earl's men happened to put down their guns, leaning them against the wall. In a twinkling, Dick reached out of the window, and seized them. "Ale or wine, gentlemen?" he asked, as if he were a tapster. And full in sight of the crowd he emptied a tankard into the muzzles, and handed the weapons out again. "Any other gentleman want a barrelful?" he inquired. A roar of laughter came from the green. One of the two men drew pistol from belt, and made as if to fire at

Dick, but I, being just behind him, knocked up his elbow, and the pistol flew out of his hand without hurt. Another roar from the spectators filled the air. Some of the Mulgrave men threw themselves on me, gripping me by the arms, and one struck me in the face. Then I, who had been so intent on prudence and peace-making, lost my wits, swung myself free from my captors, and knocked down the man who had struck me. A pretty scuffle ensued. Dick and others sprang out of the window, and came to my help with no weapons, but clenched fists and a riding whip or two. For a minute or so the struggle went on at close quarters, so that the earl's men could not use their weapons with effect, and their comrades, outside the mellay, could not strike or fire without risk of killing or maiming their own men; but at the words, "Shoot, you dolts, shoot," spoken by some one I did not see, several pieces were discharged. Will Staniforth, who was close to me, fell, blood pouring from his neck. I knelt to support him, but he was past help. The bullet had ploughed a horrible gash upward, and entered the brain. There was a gurgle in his throat, a shudder went through his whole body, and he was dead. When I rose from my knees, three of my friends had muskets in their hands, Dick Portington being one. The earl's retainers had formed a half circle in front of us, their pieces levelled.

"Yield yourselves, prisoners," said their chief, "or we fire." Dick answered by a shot which

brought the speaker to the ground, and a sort of madness came over me. I saw everything through a red haze, and cared for nothing but to avenge our dead companion. I sprang on the nearest of the enemy, tore his musket out of his grasp, and clubbed it, smiting with all my strength. As he fell, I shouted "One," and made for the next, who gave back a little, and fired wild. "Two," I yelled, as my butt crashed on his head. The third man toward whom I rushed, threw his musket down and ran. I glanced round, and saw that every one of our party had possessed himself of a musket, and was using it in the same fashion. The enemy had no time to reload; six of their fellows were disabled, including their leader; they had no stomach for more fighting hand to hand, and so, though they were more than two to one, they turned tail and ran for their lives. But being clumsy rascals, they had small chance of escape from us by that means, and were glad to obey the order which Dick bellowed as we chased them, to throw down their weapons. Guns, pistols, cutlasses, all were discarded. Even then, I still pursued until Portington laid hold of me.

"Poor devils are unarmed, Frank. Let 'em go," he said.

At that, I came to my senses, and turned back with the rest. We met a number of the men who had come from the green to pick up the spoils of war.

"Fine fellows you are," said Dick to some of

them, "to stand and look on while your neighbours are maltreated."

"As far as I can see, squire," answered a fat fellow (the same mentioned in the first chapter), "you were able to take care of yourselves, and you must excuse poor men, who don't want to go to the gallows or the Virginia plantations. For the like of us 'tis a hanging matter. For all that, some of the jassups would have run their necks into a halter, if I hadn't insensed 'em."

"Much thanks to you," replied Dick, laughing at the man's cool impudence.

"Besides, your honour," said the fellow in a lower tone, "it behoved some one to keep an eye on the Dutchmen."

"Ah! the Dutchmen. I' faith, I had forgotten them. And what came of your watch, my man?"

"Almost as soon as the fray began, the pretty Dutchwoman came to the window behind 'em, and talked with the big fellow, who seems to be in command. I crept near, but they jabbered in their own tongue. All I could make out was that she repeated 'Fermoyden' three or four times and seemed to be laying down the law to the big chap. Then off she flew, like a bird, and my Lord Sheffield came out of the house in a hurry (it was when young Squire Vavasour was cracking skulls like walnuts) and he ordered the Dutchmen to go to the help of his men, but the big captain shook his head, and either did not understand or pretended that he didn't. My lord stamped with rage, and

made his meaning plain by signs; but the other wouldn't budge, and repeated 'Fermoyden.' Fermoyden hasn't come yet, and they are waiting for him."

"What do you make of this, Frank? You came to the tavern with the lady."

"That the lady had the wit to charge the Dutch captain not to aid the Mulgrave men, but to refuse under the plea that he must have Vermuijden's authority for interfering in a quarrel which was none of his."

"By Jove, it looks uncommonly like that; and if so, some of us have to thank the lady that we are alive."

Of that I had no manner of doubt. While Dick's ill-timed jest and my hot-headed fury at a blow had brought about a broil which had cost Staniforth's life, and some others, Mistress Goel had prevented conflict between the Dutch and our Islonian crowd. As we turned the corner of the tavern (the pursuit had led us along a heathery track to the rear of it) we met Sheffield and his blackamoor, mounted, and bound apparently for Castle Mulgrave. He drew rein, and snarled—

"Treason and murder are merry sport, doubtless, but it ends in hanging, drawing, and quartering."

Now I knew whose was the voice which said "Shoot, dolts, shoot;" and the feeling which the knowledge stirred in me must have been plain in my face, for Dick linked his arm in mine, and

drew me on, saying, loud enough for Sheffield to hear—

"Let the beaten dog yelp."

We bade the tavern-keeper, who met us at his door, provide food and drink, for some of us had not eaten since early morning; and I went in search of water to cleanse myself from blood and dust, not wishing Mistress Goel to see me in my filthy plight. In truth, I shrank from meeting her, for now that my fury and strength were spent, I was ashamed of my blustering rage. But it so chanced as I went to the pump that Mistress Goel overtook me, going to the barn with a basket. At the sound of her light, gliding step, I turned, and she paled at sight of me.

"You are sorely wounded, I fear," she said. "Come to my father, who is in the barn."

"I have nothing worse than a few bruises and scratches," I answered. "For that I have to thank you; your quick wit and kindness have saved several lives to-day."

"I did no more than keep my own people from meddling in strife, which did not concern them; but how you know of it passes my comprehension."

I explained, and then asked what her father did in the barn.

"He is busy repairing heads you have damaged," she replied.

"Two at least are beyond repair, even by his skill," said I.

"Not so," she laughed. "Either your arm is

not so terribly strong as it seemed, or Lincolnshire skulls are thicker than ordinary, for my father has good hope of both the men you struck down."

"Thank God!" I said devoutly. "My brutish rage has not killed the rascals."

"Oh! but it was not brutish," cried Mistress Goel, with sparkling eyes; "you sought to avert violence. And that you were roused to great and dreadful wrath by seeing your friend shamefully and traitorously shot down is not brutish. Oh no, another word must be used for that."

How little I knew of woman's ways! I had feared that I had lowered myself in the lady's esteem for ever, and here she stood, looking up at me with dewy eyes, and speaking as if I had done some noble deed.

It would have pleased me well, if our talk might have been continued, but Mistress Goel had to hasten to her father's help, and I returned to my comrades, after having removed the stains of battle, so far as washing might do it. We were not merry over our eating and drinking, for in a room near lay the body of our friend. It was agreed that four of us should accompany the men who bore the remains to Staniforth Hall, and that the other four should ride with the Dutch to Newflete, where they had left their barge. It fell to my lot to be one of the latter company, but small good came of it to me. Doctor Goel walked on one side of the horse which his daughter rode, and the

big Dutchman on the other, so I had little converse with her. At parting, her hand lay in mine for a second, and I took some comfort from the kindness in her eyes as she said good night.

When I came to Durkness Crooke, intending to cross the river there, no boat was to be found, and I must needs ride on the river bank to the Crowle Ferry. I went slowly, for my nag was a sorry steed, hired at the Crown, Portington's horse having scampered off to his own stable during the tumult. By the time I passed Beggar's Tree, the evening had grown dusk, and I was startled by a moan from some one half hidden under a clump of birch. It was Bess Boswell, who had sprained her ankle, and begged me to send some of her tribe, whose encampment lay on my road to Temple Belwood, to convey her home. I dismounted, and helped her to my saddle, which she sat manfashion.

For some time we went on in silence, which the gipsy girl broke by saying—

"My warning came true on your birthday."

"Save your fortune-telling mystery for the bumpkins at the next fair, Bess."

"Anyhow, I knew what you did not—the mortgages and the contract between the squire and Ryther."

"True."

"And I can tell you much more that you do not know. You go in peril of your life. Lord Sheffield will stick at nothing to remove you. False

swearing, or poison, or a stab in the back, or a shot out of the reeds, all's one to him and his creatures. The slug which killed your friend to-day was meant for you."

"Are you in Lord Sheffield's counsels, Bess?" I asked.

"I know as much as if I was, and more," she replied. "Would that you could be persuaded for your good."

"How then?"

"To go away for two or three months, anywhere out of the Isle."

"And how would that advantage me?"

"If you stay, you will lose your inheritance, your freedom, and may be your life. If you go, you will save them all."

"You talk in riddles, Bess."

"I say all I dare. Most likely, I shall be beaten to-night for talking with you."

"Beaten?"

"Yes; for I have had the luck to keep you from harm. A man was hidden in the reeds to shoot you, and he couldn't be sure of getting away unseen, because I was with you. Besides, the horse has been between you and him."

"Bess!"

She leaped lightly to the ground. "There's nothing amiss with my ankle," she said. "But I knew I could get a hearing, if I cheated you into putting me on your horse. Now ride on as fast as you can, and do listen to advice. Go away soon,

and until you leave the Isle, have pistol in holster, and sword at your side, and a trusty man behind you."

She slipped through an opening in the hedge, and sped across the fields in the direction of the encampment of her folk.

Chapter V

ON arriving at Temple, I hastened to bed, and for two hours or more slept the heavy sleep of extreme weariness, but then awoke in pain and burning thirst. On getting out of bed, I found myself stiff and sore, and somewhat light-headed; so, after a draught of water, tumbled into bed again to watch for the morning in great uneasiness and impatience. At length the dawn appeared, and not long afterwards Luke entered my chamber, and made much ado about my condition, and that of my clothing, rent in places, and stiffened with blood, which he naturally supposed to be my own. His uplifted voice aroused Mr. Butharwick, who came to my room, and I was compelled to submit to an examination, which revealed more bruises and slight wounds than I had been aware of. As I had some fever upon me, my tutor and my servant took a high and mighty tone, declaring that I must keep my bed, and drink febrifuges; and I only escaped blood-letting because Luke had got it into his noddle that I had already lost at least a gallon. When once Luke got anything into his head, no other man could get it out again. In rising to prove that their solicitude was needless, a touch of giddiness laid me on my back, after which they had their way with me—they and the housekeeper,

who boasted great skill in the compounding of broths of bitter herbs and seldom had the chance to exercise her art in our healthy house.

So this day I spent in bed, having my tutor for company, my father being away on some business of his solicitorship, and having (for once) left no clerkly task for Mr. Butharwick. My old friend was in no way surprised by the things which I had heard from Mistress Goel.

"Your father knows what has been reported to the earl, and is beforehand informed of every step which his lordship takes. The 'Solicitor' has trusty spies in the earl's own household. For example, he knows that a troop of soldiers would have been ordered here ere now to search for arms, but that they could not reach Temple, either from Hull or Doncaster, without our being advertised by the marshmen."

For my part, I had no confidence in "spies," who might play a game of their own, but I held my tongue. Mr. Butharwick had infinite faith in my father's ability, and it was not for me to shake it.

Mr. Butharwick lay under great apprehension as to what might be the upshot of the skirmish at Thorne, fearing I might be summoned to appear before the President of Council on the charge of assaulting those who were, in a manner, the officers of his Majesty, but took refuge in the certainty of our knowing the purposes of the earl in time for me to hide until my father should return. I thought his fears on that score groundless. A

Vavasour could not be condemned without trial, and an open trial would be dangerous to Sheffield. As it was, the death of Will Staniforth might be laid to his charge.

Three days later, I received a letter from Staniforth's father, begging me to come to him. Though I dreaded to witness the grief of an old man, infirm, and now bereaved of his only child, I set about going. The water had risen in the marsh since Dick and I crossed, and I meant to pole over in a punt from Belshaw to Messic Mere, whence a sailing boat would carry me to Staniforth in two, or at most, three hours. And Sandtoft lay in my way.

I took Luke with me, or, as I should rather say, Luke went with me, for he gave me to understand that in future he did not intend me to go about alone, in which he was strongly upheld by Mr. Butharwick. Not that I opposed his going, for the words of the gipsy girl had an influence with me, and I even carried gun and pistol, albeit there was small likelihood we should meet with an enemy on our voyage.

Here I am put in mind by a critic (the kindest in the world) that Axholme is greatly changed from what it was at the time of which I write, and that I ought, for the better understanding of my readers, to give a more particular account than I have hitherto done of the nature of the country in my youth. The fault is plain, but not the remedy, since I am unskilled in description. The best I

can do is to prefix a map, one glance at which will show more than pages of my writing could. As to the journey to Staniforth, I may say that the space between Belshaw and Messic Mere was sometimes land, sometimes water, and more often a mixture of both. In dry seasons, swine could pick up some feed there, and, now and then, a venturesome cottager turned out a cow, keeping watch lest it should be bogged. In winter, eels were to be caught and ducks shot there. Clumps of birch, small oak, poplar, and alder grew here and there on "holmes" of gravel or sand. Long rows of reeds marked channels always filled with water; ling and gorse, in spots, flourished on the drier mounds and ridges.

On this day, as I have said, there was abundant water (though the month was June, and the summer had been almost rainless), which we supposed to be due to heavy showers further south, swelling the rivers Trent and Idle.

Luke took the pole, and pushed quickly across to the mere, where we changed into a sailing boat, and went gaily to Sandtoft, then an oblong island about four furlongs by two, or, roughly, some eighty acres in extent, surrounded by the Idle. Leaving Luke in the boat, I scrambled up the bank, which sloped steeply, and was palisaded at top to the height of six feet. I pulled myself up and looked over, and had scarcely done so when a bullet whizzed over my head, and I saw the man who had fired it reloading as he came nearer to

the fence, and others swarming out of a shed like angry bees out of a hive. Thinking it might be as dangerous to retreat as to advance, I drew myself up and tumbled, rather than jumped, down inside the palisade, and walked toward the sentinel, calling out, "A friend," which did not hinder his shooting a second time. Happily, he was no marksman. Being quite ignorant of Dutch, I continued to announce myself as a friend in English, German, and French. When we came within arm's length, two of the men collared me, and one asked in a sort of French what my business was. My answer so far satisfied them that they let go their hold, and conducted me to Doctor Goel's abode.

On the way I admired the diligence and skill which had reared a Dutch town in so short a time. A wide street of substantial houses, mainly built of wood, it is true, ran from west to east, and at either end of the street there were workshops, storehouses, and what I took to be an arsenal. As I afterwards learned, a good deal of the material had been brought over ready shaped, needing only to be put together on the spot. Some acres of ground were covered with pumps, wind-mills, sluice-gates, carts, in sections or complete, and machines and parts of machines of which I could not guess the use or purpose. One thing I saw certainly. The men who had embarked in this enterprise would not lightly abandon it. They had precise and definite plans, and they had expended vast sums of

money. The settlement was fortified as for a siege, and there were several pieces of artillery. In an open space stood the gallows, and near by a pole from which flew the Dutch flag, surmounted by the royal standard of England. To drive these people out of the Isle would require an army, and a general. As for judicial sentences, I remembered that it was a legal maxim that possession was nine points of the law. Looking round on the evidences of the king's authority, and of the wealth at the disposal of Vermuijden, and of the determination of the settlers, it came home to me that my father was losing his labour and spending money in vain. And yet I rejoiced to think that Mistress Goel was likely to remain in the Isle. It did not occur to me that I might be banished from it.

My guards led me to the doctor's house, where we found him seated at a table on which were spread a handful of feathers, a piece of fish—smelling stale—bits of touchwood, and other rubbish. As we entered the room, he laid down a queer shaped lens, through which he had been gazing at some of these things, and greeted me cordially. He and the men held a short parley, and they turned to go, when I begged the doctor (in very bad French) to assure them of the harmlessness of my man Luke, lest they should take it into their heads to shoot the poor fellow. After further talk with them, the doctor informed me that one of the men had a little English, and had promised to cer-

tify Luke that all was well with me. The doctor and I talked in a heavy fashion, bad French on my side, broken English on his, for a few minutes, when Mistress Goel appeared. She had not tarried to don her finest clothing, as is the wont of so many damsels, but came in household garb, her round, white arms bare to the elbow, her head covered by some kind of hood, which, however, she threw back as she entered the room, her fair face flushed as by her work, but a smile of welcome in her eyes—more beautiful than ever in her homely neatness. In the course of our chat, she told me that the watchmen were on the alert, because last night some bold fellows had scaled the palisade, broken some costly machinery, and endeavoured to set fire to the buildings. Vermuijden's lieutenant had given strict command to shoot every intruder who did not enter by the gates, of which it seemed there were two.

"Is it that you wear chain-mail under your clothing, or a scapulary blest by the Pope or witch's charm," she asked, "that you court danger as if you loved it?"

I was much too slow-witted to give the right answer, and blundered something about being preoccupied with the pleasure of seeing her. But *Ay di mi!* I forget that what I recall with delight will not interest the reader.

When I rose to take my leave, and Mistress Goel heard whither I was bound, she inquired whether we had food with us in the boat. On

hearing that we had none, she insisted on supplying us, "For the poor father will be overcome with sorrow, and never think of your hunger," she said. As I would not stay to take a meal with them, she retired to the kitchen, and came back cloaked, with basket in hand, followed by her maid, who carried another. Declaring that she would show me the gate, so that I need not rush on bullets when next I came, she led the way to a point about a hundred yards further round the bend of the river. I hailed Luke, who came up and received the baskets with looks of wonder. Mistress Goel commended Martha's pastry to our attention, and with "Bon voyage!" she left us.

As we fell to our luncheon, I asked Luke what had passed between him and the Dutchman who had engaged to assure him of my safety.

"'A leaned o'er fence, and 'a says, 'Icy Ingliss! Allride. Got-tam' I stared at un like a stuck pig, and 'a says again, 'Allride, Got-tam,' and grinned from ear to ear, so I knew he meant it friendly."

When we had ended our meal, Luke said, "Master Frank, I've heard cook say as foreigners can't make pastry."

"I dare say; what of that?"

"Why, it's a thundering lie; that's what it is, a thundering lie! I never ate such eel-pie in all my days. And ain't she spanking?"

"Who is spanking? Cook?"

"No, no; that Martha. 'Tis a nice, comfortable name. And what a pie it was!"

Luke's eyes were half closed, as if he were deep in meditation. At Staniforth, forgetful of his self-imposed duty of keeping guard over me, he would have remained dreaming in the boat if I had not reminded him of his duty.

The servant who admitted me whispered, "Master is very bad to-day, sir, but he will see you."

The old man sat bent forward over a turf fire, though the day was hot. The room was almost unbearably close to me. I had seen him not more than twice or thrice before, for he shrank from exposing his decrepitude to general view. Some years ago he had been thrown over his horse's head, and, in our country phrase, his back had been broken, that is, he had sustained an injury to the spine, which had deprived him of the use of his lower limbs. He was a pitiable object, cowering, almost bent double, over the fire; his long, white hair hanging about his shoulders, his beard reaching nearly to his knees, his yellow face puckered with a thousand wrinkles. But there was a fierce light in the eyes as he turned toward me and said—

"Hast done right to come, young Vavasour. Look at his grave."

He pointed to the window, from which I saw a newly made mound in the middle of a field of grass. Then, as if he answered a question, he said—

"No, the parson didn't gabble lies over him. We put his body into the ground without parson's lies." Then the old man repeated scornfully, "'We give Thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world.' It might be said for me, but not for him, my strong, handsome boy, who ought to have lived sixty years. But I prayed, young Vavasour—I prayed for death and damnation on his murderer."

The strength and fire with which the feeble old man hurled out the last words were terrible. Then his tone changed.

"The best son that ever lived he was. Up with the lark, all over the farm before breakfast, seldom taking his pleasure with his mates. Gentle as a woman! No woman would ha' been half so gentle with a peevish old man, often mad with pain. Why should the Lord take the prop of my age, the one joy of a broken-backed cripple? The Lord didn't take him, you'll say. No; but He let the devil do it. If I could but have his murderer here! Oh, that I might grip him by the throat!"

The father stretched out his arms, the trembling hands clenched, as if they grasped the neck of the man he hated. Still I said nothing. What could I say?

"He loved thee, Frank. He made me jealous at times with his talk of thee. Said how brave thou wert, how warm-hearted, what a good sportsman, what a gallant gentleman, what a true, staunch

friend! And thou led'st him to his death. It was thy quarrel he died in. He was no brawler."

"That is true," I said; "he lost his life through coming to my rescue."

"He did not lose his life," the old man screamed; "his life was taken—foully, treacherously taken, and his blood cries for vengeance. Wilt be a man and avenge him?" His eyes glittered as he asked the question.

"You cannot think of asking me to pledge myself to do murder," I answered.

"Murder! who talks of murder?" he rejoined. "If it were any other man than the son of my Lord President, I could have him hanged. But what poor man dare give evidence against him? Curse him. What lawyer in the isle or county will undertake my case? When justice is not to be had by the law, we have a right to take it. If God or devil would give me the use of my limbs, but for a single day, I would take it."

The passion of the old man lent him strength, and he drew himself up, almost erect, a fearsome sight.

But in a moment he drooped again, and moaned, and I sat silent beside him.

Then rousing himself he said, "Hast milk in thy veins instead of blood? Canst not hate the man who killed thy friend—not man to man in honest fight, but by a dastard word to his villains?"

"God knows I hate him only too well," I replied.

"Dost, Frank, dost? God bless thee for that.

Meet him, taunt him, make him draw on thee, shoot at thee; force a quarrel on him somehow, and kill him! kill him!—kill him as slowly as thou canst, so it be sure."

He put his trembling hand on my knee, and thrust his face near to mine, his eyes blazing under their bushes of dead-white hair.

"Swear it, Frank," he begged. "Swear it, and I shall die happy. Happy!" he groaned, in mockery of his own word. "Nay, don't speak yet," he said. "Listen to me. Thy father is wasting his patrimony on law and lawyers. 'Twill do no good. When did it ever do good to spend money so? But don't let that trouble thee. If thou'lt be a son to me so far as to do justice on the man that murdered Will, the Grange shall be thine, and many a good mortgage besides. Shalt be a rich man, young Vavasour."

Up to this point, I confess that the old man had been so near gaining the ascendancy over me, that I might have made him some sort of promise of vengeance on his enemy, but this offer broke the fascination.

"Your grief has maddened you, Mr. Staniforth, or you would not bribe me to do murder."

He tore his long hair with rage, and moaned—

"Fool that I was not to remember thy pride and vanity of the Vavasour breed. Some men are vain, and some are proud, but Vavasours are both. Thou wilt not avenge the murder of thy friend, who died for thee—for thee, dost hear? Thou

wilt not help his heart-broken old father, because he spoke of leaving his land to thee? Then go and the devil go with thee. May an old man's curse cling to thee all the days of thy life."

He shook with rage, and spoke with a choked voice, foaming at the lip, so that I dreaded lest he should fall into a fit and die. I hurried out of the room, and bade the servant, who met me in the hall, hasten to aid her master. Calling Luke to follow me, I sped down to the river. What a change to be out in the pure air, under the blue sky, hearing the twitter of the swallows far above, seeing green fields where cattle grazed, and the river rippling in the sunshine! And how miserable to feel that I, who had the freedom of the beautiful earth, and abounding life in me, could do nothing for the sorrow-crazed father of my dead friend!

Chapter VI

FARM business held me from going over to Sandtoft for many days. Much of our land was too rich for the growing of corn—which was apt to spoil on the ground by its own rankness—and was sown with line year after year. This season it fell to my lot to meet the merchants, who came to buy our standing crops, and to show them hospitality. Having occasion to go to Crowle on this business, bargains concluded, I paid my respects to my relatives at the vicarage, little thinking of the reward awaiting my dutiful behaviour. As I entered the door, I heard my aunt cry out, "Frank! I know your step. Come this way." The voice came from the store-room, where I found the notable housewife, among the tubs and jars and boxes, from which she had so often produced dainty cakes and preserved fruits for the delight of my juvenile palate.

"At last you have remembered that you have an aunt!" said she, lifting her face to me. "I am busy now, but I will talk to you after dinner. I have company to-day."

"What company?" I asked.

"People you know, Mistress Goel and her father. What is there in that to make you open your eyes so wide?"

"I did not know of your acquaintance with them, that is all."

My aunt gave me to understand that the vicar had visited the strangers when they lodged at the White Hart, and invited them to the vicarage. She herself had taken a violent fondness for the daughter, and for the father a superb contempt.

"The man's daft, or he would not bring a girl to live in a hole like Sandtoft, where there is no other woman except her maid and the wives of mechanics and labourers, and the men are all boors and savages. The only excuse for such barbarity is that the man has lost his wits. But there's a Providence above, and the poor, dear child will have her recompense. There's a coronet at her feet, or soon will be."

"God in heaven! You cannot mean that you favour that beast, Sheffield!"

"No profane language here, Frank. Lord Sheffield is a changed man." Nothing could exceed my aunt's complacency as she gave me this assurance.

"Has he made proposal of marriage?" I asked.

"Not directly as yet; but he is quite open with me," and the good woman smiled loftily.

"Then he comes here?"

"He has been several times to hear your uncle discourse, who is satisfied that a work of grace has begun in his lordship's soul. But, bless me! I shall be late with dinner." And she began to bustle among her stores.

"When do your guests arrive?" I asked.

"They have been here since the day before yesterday. You will find them in the garden." So saying, she hurried off to the kitchen.

What Sheffield's game might be, I could not guess; but that he had some evil design in professing to be edified by the homilies of the simple clergyman, and in flattering his still simpler wife, there could be no doubt whatever.

The sight of Mistress Goel in a chair on the grass-plot under the shade of an old pear-tree drove away my gloomy surmisings. She rose to greet me in her pretty way of formal courtesy, and when she resumed her seat, I threw myself on the grass near her, and found her bright face lovelier than ever when looked at from that position.

"How long it is since I saw you!" said I. "I have been full of business which I might not leave, or I should have been to Sandtoft ere this."

"It is well that you have not," she answered. "Our men are furious. Almost every night a machine is broken, or something is stolen, or an attempt to fire the buildings is made. Four days ago, a barge came down the river too late to be unladen, and the man who kept watch on board was seized, gagged, and bound, and the boat was scuttled, with the man in it. It was done with such stealth that our men knew nothing of it until morning, although the sentinels had been at their posts all through the night."

"But I have nothing to do with midnight marauders," I growled.

"Our men do not know that. They have heard that you are one of the instigators of these doings."

"Is not my—my acquaintance with you a warrant that I am not an enemy?"

"No. I am sorry to confess that our acquaintance leads to our being suspected rather than to your absolution."

"Good heavens! Our Islonians have not a monopoly of barbarism, it would seem."

"Remember that our men are strangers in a strange land. They are plundered, harassed, threatened. Some of their comrades have been killed. The night attacks are so skilfully made as to lead them to think there must be a traitor within the camp. My father is in the habit of walking and watching late o' nights, and I have talked with one of the enemy. Most unhappily, Vermuijden is away, and it is uncertain when he will return. I was glad indeed to leave the settlement for a few days, and you will be wise not to come over at present."

"I have no inducement to visit the settlement while you are at the vicarage, which is a much more fitting abode for you than a hut at Sandtoft."

"So Mrs. Graves will have it, and in her kindness would detain me here I know not how long; but my place is with my father, and he is by agreement physician to the settlers. You are not to think that my father brought me thoughtlessly to Sandtoft."

How beautiful she looked as she bent forward, her face aglow with love and pride!

"He is not so much absorbed in science as to forget his care for his daughter. Oh no, indeed! He would have had me stay in Leyden, when he fled. He entreated, almost commanded me to go to the care of friends in Amsterdam, when he left Paris, and to remain there until he had a suitable home for me in England. But what is home? Do masons and carpenters make it? For me, it is where my father lives. My mother died in my seventh year, and my father did his utmost to make up my loss. His grief made him an old man before his time: his days were filled with labour, and the most learned and polished society in Europe made claim on his leisure, but nothing was allowed to interfere with his tender care of his little daughter. He continued his great love for his wife in his love for her motherless child. Pardon me that I say all this, but I could not bear that you should misconstrue my father."

I forgot to answer, looking up with pure delight into the beaming eyes. Surely, she cared something for me, unworthy as I was, since she wished that I should respect her father as he deserved. At length I replied softly—

"I count it great honour that you have told me."

But my new reverence for Doctor Goel was instantly in danger, for he came up to us, a cabbage-leaf in one hand and his magnifying-glass in the other, and pointed out something to his daughter

in great excitement. He turned to me while she looked, and plunged into English, of which I reproduce the sense, not the exact words—

"Your great Bacon thought that caterpillars were engendered of dew and leaves by putrefaction. But it is not so. They come from eggs, laid by the butterfly. It is one more instance to confirm the theory that every living thing derives its being from a parent."

And the old gentleman rubbed his hands and smiled, as if he had found a diamond. 'Twas all I could do to refrain from laughing at this ado about some tiny caterpillars on a cabbage-leaf, but Mistress Goel seemed to enter into her father's pleasure, and, to my astonishment, said something to him in Latin, as if quoting a book, to which he replied by a long sentence in the same language. Then he returned to the harness-room, taking his precious cabbage-leaf with him.

Happily, the clang of the dinner-bell called us into the house, and saved me from uttering my opinion on the value of studying grubs. After dinner, during which nothing was said which needs record here, the vicar withdrew to his study, the doctor to the harness-room, where he smoked his pipe, my aunt to her room for her customary nap, so Mistress Goel and I strolled round the garden. Somehow, I was led on to talk of myself, a topic on which I was fluent, not to say vapouring. I confided to the lady the dubious state of the Vavasour fortunes, and spoke of retrieving them

by the sword. I more than half hinted at my father's project for the relief of our estate, and of difference between him and me on that account. In fine, I was autobiographical, sentimental, braggart. The patient hearing, the gentle glance, the sweet smile on my companion's lips lured me on to talk as I had never talked before. Little did I dream that I was pouring out my boyish crudities to one of the most accomplished women of the Netherlands, the bosom friend of Tesselschade Visscher, a distinguished member of the brilliant circle who made the Visscher *salon* famous throughout Europe. Happy in my ignorance, young bumpkin that I was, I babbled on, and she listened and answered as simply as any rustic damsel. I longed to tell her how I loved her, but held myself in check, remembering that I might be disinherited to-morrow, and what a poor heritage at best mine was like to be. Longed! I ached with longing. And when I thought of Sheffield, it was as though my head and heart would burst, so full I was with jealousy and rage. What I might have said, if we had been left alone awhile longer, I do not know, but my aunt came out to join us, and she stuck like a leech. I sauntered to the harness-room, where the doctor sat, smoking his pipe, and fell into talk with him. His English improved as we conversed, and I got the notion that he had once used the tongue with freedom. He asked questions about our farming, the trees and herbs in the fenny soil, the birds and beasts

of our woods and marshes. He told me curious things of the weeds spread upon a rough table before him—some too marvellous for belief, but I kept my countenance. He had been seeking glow-worms, and I told him where they were to be found. I asked him questions concerning some things which had puzzled me, and received answers full and plain. He grew very friendly, and our talk lasted until supper-time.

That supper would have been a right pleasant meal but for one thing. The room was gay with vine-leaves, green boughs, and bunches of roses in jars and vases. Never had I seen it so gracefully decked, and I knew whose handiwork it was. My aunt had skill in providing, as the table bore witness, set out with well-cooked poultry, tench, salmon, plovers' eggs, dainty tarts, and amber-coloured ale and French and Spanish wine, but the adornment of the table and the room was new and strange. When the doctor and I entered the room, "my Lord Arrogance" stood at the other end, bending reverentially to listen to the vicar's talk. He made his bow to the doctor, and we took our seats—Sheffield at Mrs. Graves' right hand, Mistress Goel next him, the doctor and I on the other side of the table.

Sheffield talked with the Goels of Brederoo's *Farce of the Cow*, and of some tragedy by Vondel. He applauded the genius and enterprise of Doctor Samuel Coster, and praised to the skies the Sisters Roemer Visscher. It was in listening to this

conversation that I discovered how intimate Mistress Goel was with those learned and beautiful ladies. The playwrights and poets of Amsterdam and Leyden were quite unknown to me, and to the vicar and my aunt; but Sheffield contrived to interest Mrs. Graves by condescending to explain to her, and appealing to her taste and judgment, and he pleased his host by a sentence now and then in which he implied that these topics were far beneath the altitude of his sacred learning. I imagined that Sheffield designed to expose my clownish ignorance in contrast with his knowledge of the literature of the Netherlands; but his evident anxiety to keep the direction of the conversation in his own hands, and an exchange of glances between father and daughter, as if some remark of his tickled them to the point of laughter, made me aware that his lordship did but repeat a lesson with which he had been stuffed for the occasion. In a little time he had taken a good deal of wine, and then he did me the honour to become aware of my presence.

"I' faith," said he, "'tis uncourteous to Vavasour to talk only of divine poesy. Does line fetch a good price this year?"

The inquiry was addressed to me, but before I could answer, Mistress Goel shot me a question—

"What did you say was the motto of Sir William Vavasour?"

I had said nothing of a motto peculiar to this ancestor of mine, and could not at once see the

drift of the query. Then I perceived that it was meant to stay the anger which had sent the hot blood into my face, and I answered her with the first jingle I could remember.

Soon after sunset thick clouds gathered, cutting short the twilight, and candles were brought in. Then my aunt prayed Mistress Goel to sing, and I learned what ineffable delight may be in music, for the singer had the art-concealing art, and sang as the thrushes and nightingales do. The old spinet became another instrument under the touch of her fingers. I sat entranced, listening to song after song, watching the singing with devouring eyes. To my wonder the songs were chiefly English, and some of them the simple ballads dear to peasant-folk. By-and-by Mrs. Graves asked for "that Spanish duetto," which she had heard Sheffield sing with her guest, and he condescended to gratify her. 'Twas a concert of crow and nightingale, but the fellow tugged at his collar, and stuck up his chin, and wriggled about, as if his performance had been the finest in the world.

During the last hour the low rumble of distant thunder had been heard, and just as the Spanish song ended, there came a flash of lightning, and a tremendous peal of thunder immediately followed, loud enough to be the crack of doom. My aunt began a great fuss about having no bed to offer me, and the necessity of my going home before the storm grew worse, and I was in a manner forced out of the house. So I made my adieux,

promising the doctor some glow-worms in a day or two. As I bade Mistress Goel good night I thought her little hand trembled, and there was a look in the brown eyes which I chose to interpret as concern for my safety.

On first setting off, Trueboy was uneasy, the lightning becoming frequent and the thunder almost continuous, but a firm rein and a little soothing brought him to composure.

I have never seen lightning more splendid. At every flash a fire seemed to run along the ground before me, and the water on either side glared redly, while quite distant trees showed, or appeared to show, their every leaf. Near Hirst Priory, some cattle and horses, which had leaped the fences in their panic, were scampering to and fro on the causey like mad creatures, running great risk of bogging themselves in the swampy margins of the road. It would have been unneighbourly to pass on and leave Farmer Brewer's bestial to their fate, so I opened the gate of the drift, and then gathered and drove all I could see into their owner's grounds. It was slow and difficult work, the beasts being so wild with fear, and the only light that of the flashes which followed one another for some seconds without intermission, the succeeding darkness bringing me to a stand; but at length it was done. Then I battered and bawled at the door of the hind's cottage. He opened after some minutes, and stood quaking and shaking like a man in an ague-fit.

"O Lord! Be it you, Mester Frank? I thought it was the devil come to fetch me. The Almighty's terrible angry, for sure."

I bade the man stick some bushes on the gate and the fences near, remaining to see that he obeyed, bantering him the while on his ridiculous fear that his sins had put the elements into such commotion. When he had finished the job, I rode slowly on, pondering a fact which I had noted in collecting the cattle, namely, that the waters of the marsh had risen, and encroached on the causeway here and there, although no rain had yet fallen. All at once, Trueboy started off at a great pace, and I became aware of hoof-beats behind me. I pulled him up, and he capered about a bit, for he was never willing to be passed on the road.

"Out of the way, there," shouted a voice, which I recognised as Sheffield's.

I turned in the saddle, and asked, "Is my lord so drunk as to need all the breadth of the causey?"

"Oh, it is you!" answered Sheffield. "You might as well have staid to see my leman give me the parting kiss, hanging on my neck, pressing her sweet lips to mine."

By this time we were riding side by side.

"Liar!" said I, and dealt him a blow across the face with my whip.

I drew rein, expecting that he would take instant revenge with sword or pistol, and ready enough for the encounter, though I had no weapon but the one I had used. But he did not strike. He

said something which I could not understand, and I felt a crashing blow on the head. I remember thinking I had been struck by lightning. The next thing I knew was that I lay on the causey, dizzy and sick. By degrees, I found that my clothing was drenched, and supposed that the rain had come and soaked me while I lay unconscious. Then I perceived that Brewer's hind was stooping over me, and that he was dripping wet. Shortly afterwards, I came fully to myself, and heard the man's account of what had befallen me. Briefly, it was this: he had lingered at the gate a minute or two after I rode away, and saw two horsemen follow me. Thinking they might be highwaymen, he had plucked up courage to run after them, and came near enough to recognise by a flash that one of the men was Sheffield's gigantic black servant. Supposing me to be in no danger from him or his master, the man had turned toward his cottage again, when he heard a great splash, and a succession of lightning gleams showed him two men riding off, and my horse riderless. He hurried up, and found Trueboy, up to the chest in the water, trembling. The fellow had the wit to guess that the horse was trying to reach his master, so he waded cautiously forward, and found me lying two feet below the surface. My enemy had shown readiness and cleverness, assuredly. But for the presence of the one spectator, I should have drowned quietly, and it would have been supposed that the death was accidental.

"Now, Stubbs," said I, "you have made me your friend and debtor for life; but you must remember that if you say a word of this matter, you will make another sort of debtor, who will pay you quickly."

Stubbs vowed perpetual silence, and we parted, I to ride home, feeling extremely queer. The lightning still flashed, but at longer intervals, and before I had gone a hundred yards, there came a gust which tossed upward the tree branches and beat down the reeds, and the rain fell in streams. That was no matter to me, for I was as wet as man could be, but Trueboy misliked it, so the rest of our way we flew.

Chapter VII

LUKE burst into my room early next morning, to tell me that the waters were out to a height such as no one remembered. The Don, which had been turned by the Dutchmen into a channel connecting it with the Aire, had taken its old course with fury, flooding the western side of Crowle as with a second deluge. I jumped out of bed, almost forgetting the aching and soreness of my head and the stiffness of my limbs, for, if this account were true, the inhabitants of the Crowle vicarage were in jeopardy. Luke assured me that "'twas no manner of use to try to reach Crowle by riding, for t' causey was under water;" so after I had broken fast with a crust and a cup of small ale, I had out my boat, and taking Luke with me, set sail northward. The marsh had become a deep lake, and the low-lying fields in our neighbourhood were flooded, and here and there we came on the carcase of a sheep or a pig; but when we drew near to Crowle there was a sorry sight indeed. The cornfields on the slopes of Totlets had disappeared under muddy water, and several clay-built cottages had crumbled and fallen in. Some of the recent tenants were about in punts, gathering up what they could of their bits of furniture. From them we learned that no

life had been lost there. The folk had been aroused by the barking and whining of a dog, and had taken refuge on higher ground, before the old walls fell in. As we came nearer to the town, the water was so cumbered with wreckage, that we let down the sail, and took to the oars, lest we should foul among the bundles of reeds, straw-stooks, empty casks, dead sheep and swine, hay rakes, pails, and other things innumerable, which were strewn on the surface of the water. Some of the more westerly houses were surrounded with water up to the lower windows, and at sight of us, the inhabitants, who were at the upper windows, set up a great cry for help. We shouted that we would come, or send to them, as soon as might be, our first concern being the vicarage. Passing Farmer Dowson's on our right, we saw him and his men, waist-deep in the water, staggering under bags of corn, carrying pigs in their arms, struggling with frightened horses, leading them to the higher ground behind the farmstead. The farmer hailed us, but only to relieve his soul by shouting a malediction on the Dutch. The water became shallower as we neared the church, for (as we discovered later) the first rush of the river had brought down an immense quantity of silt, which had been deposited in a bed sloping from the wall of the churchyard. To our surprise we found the depth at the gate of the vicarage not more than two feet. We moored our boat to the old oak, and with some difficulty, for the bottom was soft,

made our way to the house, where we found the inmates in safety on the upper floor. My aunt was loud in lamentation over her goods and chattels and store of food. The vicar's most pressing care seemed to be a funeral, which had been arranged for this day. Doctor Goel was poring over a plan of the drainage, going again through calculations, which proved to his satisfaction that the channel cut for the Don was deep and wide enough to carry off its water into the Aire in any possible event, and that the embankment raised must infallibly resist whatever pressure could be brought against it. He was so perfectly certain that what had happened could not by any chance occur, that I was obliged to laugh in his face—and mightily offended him.

"You cannot suppose, doctor," said I, "that the Islonians have broken down the embankment for the pleasure of drowning themselves."

"I do not know that," he snapped. "They are stupid enough."

Remembering how the water had gradually accumulated before the coming of the great rain, I believed that neither the drain for the turning of the Don, nor that for the conveyance of the surface water had been large enough for its purpose, but I did not offer my wisdom to the doctor just then.

Mistress Goel asked many questions, and wept and wrung her hands to hear of the distress of the people, but she was quickly her calm self again, entering into talk of what had best be done for

them. My first notion had been to collect as many boats as were to be had, and to go to bring the folk from the outlying farms and cottages to Crowle.

"But you need not do that," said she, "unless there is danger of a house giving way. The water is subsiding."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"By a mark I made on the staircase wall at five o'clock this morning. The water has sunk three inches since then."

I said something in praise of her self-possession in a time of alarm, but she urged me to the present work.

"The poor people out in the flood," said she, "will have little or nothing to eat. Their food will be spoiled, and they will have no means of procuring fresh supplies. That is the first thing to be thought of. And the mere sight of a friendly face will do them much good. Will it not be best to load your boat with a stock of such provisions as are to be had, and to send some one of influence round the town to urge others to follow you?"

To this I agreed, and, after some further talk, I turned to go. As I stepped into the water at the foot of the stairs, she called to me from the landing—

"Oh, Frank, don't forget milk for the children."

I looked up, and saw her face burning. "I will not forget," I answered, and out I strode with the music lingering in my ears.

Old men and women still tell the tale of the great flood, and part of the tale is how the "young squire" of Temple did feats of rowing, lifting, and carrying in helping the folk. If I was bold and active beyond the ordinary on that day, and I think I was, the secret is that I had heard my name for the first time from the lips of my love, and seen her blush to use it.

It is no affair of mine to repeat the chimney-corner story. It suffices to say that I and Luke and a dozen willing fellows worked our hardest until dark, visiting every farmstead and every hovel which remained standing on the lower levels.

A score cottages right on the bank of the river, occupied by labourers and marshmen and their families, had been swept clean away, with what destruction of life could not then be known. The farmers' losses were terribly heavy. The havoc done among horses and cattle was considerable, and hundreds of swine and thousands of sheep had been drowned. Stacks were overthrown and spoiled, and the standing crops were ruined.

How the men cursed the Dutch! Their threats of vengeance made me wish that Mistress Goel and her father were safely out of Crowle. For our Islonians are not fellows who ease their minds with a curse, and then think no more of it, but of that slow, stubborn kind, which smoulders first and does not flame until the end. I assured them that their "Solicitor" would demand compensation for their losses. I argued that this disaster might

have so much good in it as to justify my father's resistance to the Vermuijden scheme, and oblige the King and his advisers to hear reason. But I met with bitter and scornful laughter for the most part.

One man said, "'Taint no sort of use to talk so, Mester Frank. Your father is a real gentleman, but he's no match for the Dutch devils. We didn't ought to ha' listened to his peaceable kind of discoursing. Squire Portington's is the way to deal with robbers and murderers like Vermuijden and his gang."

Pretty nearly all were of the same mind, and I returned to the vicarage dispirited and apprehensive, and so weary and spent and heavy with sleep, that I crept off and tumbled into bed, too tired even to talk with Mistress Goel.

Most unexpectedly, the vicar requested me to remain a few days at his house. Hitherto, we had had little to say to each other; he never had much to say to any one. I had disliked him from my early childhood, when I got the impression that he was bound in parchment like one of his folios, and that the back of his head had been chopped off. His days were passed among those folios, and Mr. Butharwick spoke with respect of his learning, but what good came of it I never knew. He preached sermons of an inordinate length, and totally incomprehensible to me, and, as I judged, to his parishioners generally, who composed themselves for slumber when they heard the text. My aunt

attended to all the affairs of the parish, and always inspected the parson before he left the house, to see that he was decently clad, and had his handkerchief in his pocket.

The calamitous flood aroused him to the every-day life around him, not all at once, but slowly. He entered into the sorrows of his bereaved parishioners especially, of whom there were many. One Coggan, a small farmer, had been found dead in the water at the foot of a ladder descending from his bedroom. Another man, a somewhat drunken fellow, had been overtaken by the flood, while sleeping off his drink on the kitchen floor. An old man, whose people had left him alone for the night, had been caught and overwhelmed in the act of opening his door, apparently. The child of Ducker, the blacksmith, had been ailing for a day or two, but on the night of the inundation had fallen asleep on a couch, and slept so peacefully that the mother would not disturb its slumber, but covered it up as it lay, and went to bed. She found it drowned in the morning. Besides these cases in the town itself, numerous bodies were recovered in the neighbourhood of the cottages on the banks of the Don and elsewhere. In these circumstances, many appeals were made to the vicar for guidance, help, and consolation. The sexton lost his wits, poor man, and there were difficulties in making preparation for the decent interment of so many bodies, as well as difficulties as to who would guarantee payment for this and

that. We were hard put to it to find a messenger to go for the coroner, every man's hands were so full of his own, or his master's business. Consequently, the vicar impressed me into service, and gave everything into my charge. I must do him the justice to acknowledge that he was diligent in attending to his spiritual duties, and generous with his purse. The painful and somewhat horrible details are no necessary part of my narrative, and so I leave them; but, as may be supposed, I was fully occupied for several days.

There was an hour every evening which made up, and more than made up, for all the weariness and trouble of the day, when Mistress Goel talked awhile with me, or sang to me. Our talk was mainly of the one engrossing subject, and there could be no quiet, private chat at such a time; but to see her and to hear her voice was enough to make me happy for the present.

Luke made me somewhat uneasy by telling me that he had overheard conversation at the White Hart, and elsewhere, to the effect that Doctor and Mistress Goel had come over to Crowle "to charm the water." Dame Hind had had much to say of the certainty of their being in commerce with the devil, and some of her guests swore to put an end to the witches at the first opportunity. Although I did not think these threats very serious, and had perfect confidence in my own ability to protect my friends, being in high favour with the Crowle folk, I contrived to restrain them from going

beyond the vicarage grounds, except when I could accompany them. Luke was exceedingly afraid, but as he had always a keen nose for scent of danger, his fears did not excite mine.

On the third evening of my stay, Sheffield was announced. He met me without a trace of confusion.

"Ha, Vavasour!" he said. "Give you joy of coming to life again."

"Thanks—much thanks," I replied.

"Coming to life again!" cried my aunt. "What do you mean, my lord?"

"Has he told you nothing? When last I saw him, on the night of the thunderstorm, he was struck by lightning."

"Struck by lightning!" my aunt echoed.

"Yes; I overtook him on the road, and we got into some sort of quarrel, about what I don't remember, for, to confess the truth, I was too drunk. We were riding side by side, jabbering angrily, when I saw a ball of fire flashing down. It struck Vavasour, and he fell from his horse. I am ashamed to say that I was so dazed and terrified that I rode off as fast as I could, and left him to his fate."

Being pressed to give my account, I said, "I did not see the flash which knocked me down, and I can tell you no more, except that I found myself in bed next morning, little the worse."

My aunt gave me a scolding (with tears in her eyes) for my reticence, and was touchingly grateful

to Sheffield for informing her of the peril I had been in. Doctor Goel's interest was in the meteor, and he asked so many questions about the size and shape and colour of it, the degree of its brightness, the length of time it was visible, and so forth, that Sheffield got himself into a coil of contradictions, and then excused them on the ground that he was very drunk at the time.

"By Bacchus," said the doctor, "you must have been."

One person kept silence, but her bright eyes were observant of Sheffield and me. Doctor Goel turned to me, and endeavoured to extract some account of my feelings, but I stuck to it that I could tell nothing more. Sheffield took himself off, declining my aunt's invitation to stay supper.

Mistress Goel hinted a desire for a walk, and I, being eager enough, stood ready to accompany her. While she put on her hat and wrap, I waited in the hall, and Luke, who was never far from my elbow at this time, came to me with my pistols.

"You may need 'em," said he, in a low voice. "I've seen some ugly fellows about this evening."

I laughed, but took them, and the belt which Luke had not forgotten, and armed myself besides with a tough ash-stick, which I reckoned the best weapon a man could carry.

We took the path winding upward through the wood to Crown Hill, the moon, now nearly full, shining intermittently through scudding clouds into our faces.

"I want to ask about the attempt made on your life the other evening," my companion said abruptly. "Oh!" she continued, "I know the tale about a thunderbolt is altogether false. You were struck down from behind, and left for dead. Your assailant cannot understand how it is you are alive, so he makes up a story as a defence for himself, perhaps, or, more probably, to provoke you to say something which may clear up what is mysterious to him. And you saw the design, and would not betray the secret."

"This is wizardry!" I said, staring.

"Oh dear, no! it is ordinary woman's wit, enlightened by the looks which passed between you and your enemy."

I granted that she had rightly discerned, but said nothing of what followed the knock-down blow.

"You are determined to keep secret the manner of your rescue?" she asked.

"At present, yes," I answered.

"Doubtless you have good reason. But there is another matter on which I wished to speak with you. Do you allow that there is such a virtue as prudence? If so, is it prudent to expose yourself to an enemy—a powerful, crafty, unscrupulous enemy?"

Then I burst out, "Do you bid me run away from him? Because——"

"Stay one moment," said she. "Surely prudent avoidance and cowardly flight are not the same thing."

"There is too much of a family likeness for me to distinguish between them," said I.

"So I feared," she answered. "What is the noise we hear?"

It was the noise of a crowd—hurrying feet, hoarse shouts. It came rapidly near. The mob was coming up the hill. Now I could hear distinctly "foreign witch," "Dutch devil," and other cries of a fouler kind. Unmistakably we were pursued. On the crest of the hill stood an old windmill, which might shelter us, and thither I hurried Mistress Goel. The door was padlocked, but one strong kick crashed it open. Pushing my companion inside, I took up the door, laid it across the entrance, dragged a few sacks of corn against it, and had a tolerable barricade; not a moment too soon, for the mob was upon us, with a yell of disappointed rage at sight of the obstacle in their way.

"Can you load a pistol?" I asked Mistress Goel.

"Yes," she answered.

I detached powder-horn and shot-bag from my belt, and passed them to her.

"I will throw my pistol into your lap, if I have to fire; reload it and give it to me, keeping well behind me," I ordered.

By this time the crowd had gathered in front of the mill. Luckily we were in shadow, and the moonlight was full on them. For half a minute they halted, and a murmur of talk among the leaders was the only sound. Then one of them stepped forward.

"One stride nearer, and I fire," I said quietly.

"Nobody wants to hurt *you*, Measter Frank," the fellow said. "Give up the witch, that's all we ask."

"There's no witch here," I answered. "There is a lady, the guest of your vicar; woe betide you if she comes to harm at your hands! But you will have to murder me before you lay finger on her."

"She be a witch, and brought the water on us; Nancy Isle knows it for sartain sure," replied the spokesman.

(This Nancy Isle was a poor creature in her dotage, but still held in repute as a "wise woman.")

"She gave Mat, hostler, stuff that cured his ague in no time," shouted a voice. "Has a charm to tame wild things," cried another. "Doth wash all over in cold water every morning, which would kill any Christian; Lisabeth, maid at the vicarage, told me herself," bawled another. "She makes hell-broth of galls and toadstools and caterpillars. I've seen the old devil agathering 'em for her," said another. "On with you, you cowards," shrieked a female voice. "Are you feared of one man, and him bewitched? She killed my innocent babe, and I'll tear her eyes out." And Ducker's wife came forward with a rush, three men following.

I shot the first of them through the shoulder, and he fell; I brought the butt of the pistol down heavily on one hand of the woman, who was claw-

ing at the barrier like a wild cat, which sent her howling. The other two men came on slowly enough to give me time to toss the pistol into my companion's lap, and to cower for an upward blow with the fist. I struck one of them under the chin, and he went backward insensible; but the second got half over the door before I could deal with him. With some shame, though I was fighting for more than life, I gave him a kick in the "wind," which settled him for a while. So far I had splendid luck, and the enemy were a bit cowed, but if they came on in a body, I must be overborne by sheer weight. Their pluck was not sufficient for that just now; they began to throw stones, which was not a bad move, seeing that I was bound to guard the doorway. I received a tremendous blow on the jaw. Then followed a lull, which ended in one of the crowd calling to me—

"We don't want to kill thee, young squire."

"Thanks," I replied. "I am not much killed so far."

"We don't want to kill thee. Give up the witch, and we'll swim her. If she sinks, we'll go away. If she floats, thou'lt leave her. We can't say fairer nor that."

"Now listen to me," I answered. "You can have any one tried by proper course of law for witchcraft. If you take the law into your own hands, I shall kill some of you, and the rest will be hanged for killing me."

They replied by a volley of stones, and a furious rush. A stone struck Mistress Goel, and she sank to the floor. I could do nothing for her, save push her with my foot as far back from the door as I could reach, for the men were on me, shouting, and brandishing sticks and knives. I stepped back, counting on their jamming themselves together in the opening, which they did, coming on pell-mell. Attempting no kind of guard, I stood to crack intruding heads. A knife was thrown, and stuck in my left shoulder, whether in cloth or flesh, I knew not. My good ash-plant struck three heads down, and my boot smashed a face at a corner. Then the fellows drew off a little, dragging their fallen comrades with them, but still facing the doorway; so I whipped out pistol, and shot one of them in the leg. That sent them out of range.

"Hand me the pistol," said my companion, rather faintly.

"Thank God!" I ejaculated, but I could not leave my post to see her.

Some of the men were talking loudly, and pointing; others ran off in various directions. Shortly, they returned, carrying dead branches and heaps of straw. They made for the other side of the mill, keeping well out of pistol shot. Plainly they meant to set the mill on fire and burn us out. It would blaze quickly, for it was slightly built, and the timber old and dry, and I feared that the place would be too hot for us long before a large number

of people were drawn to the spot; but our best plan was to stay where we were as long as might be possible. The bulk of our enemies now sat on the ground to await the result of the fire. I might have broken a hole through the mill wall, but our safety—such as it was—depended on there being only one opening to guard. So, keeping one eye on the enemy, I looked at Mistress Goel's hurt. It was a gash over the eye, and had bled copiously, but the bleeding had ceased. She insisted on cutting open my sleeve, from which the knife had fallen, after sticking there some time, and found a deepish cut, and my sleeve soaked with blood. She bound up the wound with a strip from her dress. Now we heard a great crackling and roaring outside. The fire had taken hold.

"Frank," said Mistress Goel, and my heart thrilled at the word and the tone. "Frank, promise that you will kill me rather than let me fall into their hands. I would ask for a pistol to do it myself, but you may have need of them. Promise me, by all that is most sacred to you."

"I promise you that you shall not be taken alive, by the most sacred of all things to me—my love for you."

The heat of the mill grew stifling. Snaky flames came through the cracks and crevices, and hissed upward.

"We must try for life," I said, and pulled away the sacks and the door.

The enemy awaited us. All at once, they turned

the other way, and the head constable rode into view, followed by a posse of young men, some on horseback, some on foot. Then the crowd fled a dozen ways, and I carried my fainting lady into the midst of a group of cheering, laughing friends.

Chapter VIII

THE task of answering the hundred and one questions of our rescuers fell upon Mistress Goel, for I could not speak distinctly, my cheek and lips being so swollen. Two of my friends hoisted me upon their shoulders, in spite of my growling resistance, while other two made "a chair" for her with their arms and sticks, and we were carried with shouting to the vicarage, terrifying the good folk there no little by the noise. When my aunt saw Mistress Goel's blood-stained face and my puffed cheek, she fell to laughing and crying in a breath, and cried out that I was the most reckless fellow in the world, and not to be trusted with the care of a lady. The doctor clasped his daughter to his breast, and then held her off to examine her hurt, and turned to glare at me fiercely, as if I had done the mischief. Oddly enough it was the vicar who called for sponge and water, bandages, plaister, and the like; recommended the doctor to lose no time in attending to our wounds; imposed silence on the dozen who were babbling all at once, and, in short, put us into order.

Luke told how he had followed us, being in some fear that we might be attacked, but he had been astonished by the number of the crowd,

which had gathered so quickly, and appeared to be under the direction of a man, who was a stranger to him. He saw us take refuge in the old mill, and then thought it better to call a party to our aid than to come single-handed. Accordingly, he had set off to give the alarm to the young fellows who had worked with us on the day after the flood, and, by great good luck, found the chief constable of the wapentake at supper in one of the houses at which he called. The rest of the story may be understood without the tedium of further words by me. During Luke's recital, Doctor Goel had attended to his daughter's hurt, and now gave me his care. My cut in the shoulder he pronounced unimportant, but shook his head over the injury to my jaw. At present, he could do little but bind a wet rag about my face, and give me a wash for the mouth, with a caution to swallow none of it. Meanwhile, my friends, on Mistress Goel's report, were making me out to be a hero, and there I sat with a swelled face, rolling a liquid in my mouth which made me wince, and unable to say a word. It struck me as so queer a fix for a hero to be in that I laughed, spurting out some of the doctor's stuff, and gulping some of it down, but the coughing fit and the pain which followed effectually cured me of inclination to further laughter.

The chief constable deemed it advisable to set a watch over the vicarage for the night, himself remaining in command.

"There is no telling to what lengths the rabble may go, when they have got suspicion of witchcraft into their heads," said he; "and, in my judgment, it would be wise for Doctor and Mistress Goel to take shelter among their own people at Sandtoft as soon as may be."

We were not disturbed during the night, and that happened on the morrow which, for a time at least, put our affairs into the shade. We received a visit from a Royal Commissioner, who caused public proclamation, with beat of drum, that all well-disposed persons and good subjects were to wait on him in the course of the next three days in the Court-room at the White Hart, where the Manor Court was usually held, there to prove their loyalty to the throne by loans, benevolences, free gifts of money, and tender of service to his Majesty. This personage appeared at the vicarage early in the day, attended by a file of musketeers. I happened to be with the vicar in a room where he transacted such parish business as he could not depute to my aunt, when a pot-bellied man swaggered in, with what he meant for an air of dignity, but which in reality was a consciousness of the musketeers outside. After curt salutation, he took a seat, and opened by saying—

"You received instructions from the archbishop to preach to your flock on the duty of contributing to the royal exchequer, so preparing them for my visit. You thought it sufficient to read the letter from the pulpit. Explain your disobedience."

Something of the old Adam still lived in the clergyman, and flashed from his eyes.

"By what authority do you——" he began. But the other broke out—

"Authority! authority, quotha! Authority enough to send a bishop to jail, if he gave me occasion."

At this point I did an exceedingly prudent action. The commissioner held his neck awry, and my hands itched to give it a twist right round, so I walked out of the room and a temptation which might become too strong for me. From prudence to policy is but one step. The next thing I did was to send Luke out to the musketeers with strong ale, bidding him stay to learn how they liked the brew, and anything else they chose to tell him. They told him a good deal. The commissioner had a list of the gentry and farmers in the neighbourhood, and against each name the amount to be demanded. He had another list of poorer folk, including the names of young men who might be impressed for service in the army or navy, unless they, or their relatives, were ready to buy a discharge. There did not appear to be any limit to the powers of this bashaw. Before his entry into the Isle he had sent several gentlemen to prison for refusing to pay his demand in full. Some reputed misers of low degree, who had pleaded poverty, he had tied up by the thumbs. Incredible sums had been extorted from poor old women by threatening to take away their sons.

Fellows who had been "insolent" to his Majesty's representative, had been shipped off to the plantations. The corporal had favoured Luke with the opinion that the King would get so much money by this collection as to put him above the need to ask Parliament for another shilling.

The pot-bellied man left the vicarage soon after I received this account, taking with him fifty pounds, and the vicar retired to his study, perhaps for prayer.

In the course of the morning Mr. Butharwick came over to see me, bringing a summons from the commissioner, requiring my father's attendance at the White Hart, so about one o'clock I joined the company assembled there. The commissioner, Tunstall by name, as we learned from the reading of his warrant under the Great Seal, which he allowed some of the gentlemen to inspect, sat at a table, with a scribe on his left hand, four or five of his musketeers standing behind him. There were seats for the men of rank and condition, but two-thirds of the floor were filled by a standing crowd. After the reading of the warrant, Tunstall made a long pompous speech, setting forth the necessities of the King, the duty of his subjects, and the trouble caused in the realm by factious and treasonable persons, who had abused their privileges and his Majesty's leniency by contriving to delay the voting of supplies, urgently required for the defence of the kingdom, and the dignity of the Crown. The short of it was the king wanted

money badly, and we were to find it, or the consequences would be disagreeable. The commissioner looked at his papers, and then said that the first name on his list was that of George Stovin of Totlets, assessed at five hundred pounds. Squire Stovin rose, and spoke—

"It is not for me to judge of his Majesty's requirements, or to give an opinion as to the propriety of this unwonted way of meeting them, but only to say that the demand made on the gentry and farmers of Crowle—and on the gentry and farmers of Axholme generally—is to the last degree ill-timed. Hundreds of acres in various parts of the Isle, which last year bore heavy crops, are reduced to swamp by the action of foreign invaders, who are under his Majesty's protection. In this part of the Isle, many of us have been brought within a little of beggary. I myself have had the cottages in which my labourers lived swept away, and most of my barns and outbuildings. Scores of my sheep have been drowned—my crops are lost. It is monstrous to ask me to give money to the King. I want compensation from the King."

There followed a loud rumble of assent to Squire Stovin's speech. As soon as it ceased, the commissioner gave some order in a low voice to the corporal, and then said—

"That treasonable talk will cost thee more than five hundred pounds, thou impudent rebel. I allow thee one hour to send and get what may be wanted for a sojourn in Lincoln castle."

At the word, a musketeer seized the squire, and tied his hands behind him. A growl of angry voices was heard all over the room, and, a tumult might have happened, but, at some signal which I did not perceive, a score musketeers entered by the door behind the assemblage.

Squire Stovin called out: "Will some friend be kind enough to go to tell Mrs. Stovin I am going a journey, and want my portmanteau?"

"No man quits the room except by my permission," bawled the commissioner, as a number of gentlemen turned to do the squire's errand.

Daft Jack, the town idiot, shambled forward from the rear to the table.

"May be your worship's honour will give me leave to go," he said; "but I should like to give the poor King ninepence." And with that the fool laid the coin on the table.

The commissioner, mindful of the chuckling sound of laughter, threw the piece back to poor Jack, bidding him begone about his business.

The fellow made a gesture of amazement, and then repocketed his money, and shambled off to the other end of the room, talking to himself in his high falsetto voice the while—

"'Tis a long way to Lincoln, and ferries to cross, and nasty bits of road, and footpads and highwaymen about. I wish the squire may get there safely, poor man."

A faint smile at Daft Jack's concern for the prisoner's safe arrival, crossed the commissioner's

face. He evidently did not suspect Daft Jack's real intent. Then he called out—

"See you bring the prisoner's portmanteau straight to me, d'ye hear, fool?"

"Yes, yes, your honour," answered Jack.

"James Tankersley, wheelwright," the clerk read out, and the wheelwright stepped forward, well known as a poor, but industrious man, the sole support of an aged mother and his sisters, two sickly women.

"Hast the honour to be chosen to serve his Majesty, Tankersley," grinned the commissioner.

"Would ask nothing better, your worship, but my poor old mother and my sisters depend on me for their bread."

"That's no affair of mine, man. The day after to-morrow you march with me. If you skulk, you'll be shot as a deserter, that's all."

The big fellow trembled like a leaf in the wind.

"Oh! your honour," he cried, in a choking voice, "have pity on us. 'Twill kill my mother."

"Stop your snivelling!" shouted the commissioner, "or I'll have you strapped up and flogged. If you're a damned coward, pay me ten pounds for a discharge."

"Ten pounds!" cried the poor fellow; "I haven't a pound in the world, and half the wood in the yard isn't paid for."

Farmer Brewer came to the front, and said: "I will buy his discharge."

"God bless you, Mr. Brewer," said the wheelwright.

"Brewer? Have we that name on the list?" asked the commissioner of his clerk.

Then the two of them rummaged among their papers, but seemed to have no record of the farmer's existence. At length the commissioner looked up and said—

"A man who has ten pounds to spare for another must be well to pass, Mr. Brewer. Fifty pounds for the King will be no burdensome demand."

A murmur went round the room, for the farmer had lost heavily in the flood, and everybody knew that he had never prospered greatly. Something to this effect, Brewer began to plead, but was cut short.

"I am not here to argue, my man, but to collect money. If you are obstinate, I have the means at hand to persuade you feelingly. Bring the sixty pounds by three o'clock, or you will learn what they are. Corporal, pass this man out."

So things went on, man after man being bullied and threatened, and sent off to scrape money according to the commissioner's assessment. The proceedings were exciting enough at the time, but they would be wearisome to narrate. They were interrupted by Daft Jack's return, in less than the hour allotted, with the squire's portmanteau, which he dumped down with a bang just inside the room, saying as he sat down on the floor with his back against the door, mopping his face, "I can't carry

it a step furder; take it to his honour, one of you." At a nod from the corporal, one of his men went forward with it, and placed it on the table. The clerk opened it for the inspection of his chief, when with a humming and buzzing noise which filled the room, a swarm of angry wasps rushed out. What happened then I cannot describe. I saw the commissoner and his clerk striking, dancing, in a frenzy, through a darting haze of furious insects.

Looking the other way, I saw a mass of hunched backs and bent heads, helter skelter to the door. Exit thus was too slow for my fancy, with a cloud of wasps round my head, so I jumped from the only window which opened door-wise. It was a good long drop to the ground, but several active men followed me. We found Squire Stovin in saddle in front of the inn, his feet tied under the horse's belly, his guards mounted on each side, and a big crowd gathered round them, hustling and jostling one another in a manner that boded no good to the troopers, most of the men having their poles in their hands. Mischief would have begun before now, but for Mr. Stovin's authority with the fellows. Shortly, the corporal came out to say that the commissioner being unable to give the instructions for which the men were waiting, he would take the responsibility of setting the squire free on parole. Mr. Stovin readily gave it; his bonds were removed, and a mob escorted him home, huzzaing until they were hoarse. Host

Hind told me that Tunstall and his clerk were fearfully stung, and in no small danger. "His head's near as big as his belly," said Hind of the commissioner. About him I had no concern, but much about poor Jack, who would be horribly punished, doubtless, if he were caught. And, besides, I felt some curiosity. I found Jack in his one-roomed hovel at the south end of the town, with a quantity of articles spread out on the clay floor: a pair of cleat boards, a leather bottle, a whittle, coils of wire and band, a ball of worsted string, fish-hooks, corks, cross-bow, a few cakes of black bread, and other things, some of which he was in process of transferring to his many and capacious pockets.

"I'm going to my hunting-lodge on Thorne moors," said he, with perfect gravity.

"A little money may be of use," I said, tendering some.

"No, thank you, Mester Frank," he replied. "I'm not likely to want any. There's a plenty of hares, rabbits, moor-fowl, fish, eggs on my estate."

Jack's confidence was well grounded, I knew, as he had the utmost skill in placing a snare for a rabbit, snickling a pike, or luring a bird within shot.

"Do you mind telling me how you came to put a wasp's nest into the squire's portmanteau, Jack?"

"All a mistake through being deep in thought, Mester Frank."

"How so?"

"Coming down the drive, I see a wasp-hole in the bank. And I wanted wasp-grub for bait. So I clodded the hole, and pulled the nest out, you see."

"But you didn't want live wasps, Jack."

"Live wasps are very good for dibbing, Mester Frank, if you know how to handle 'em. But, being deep in thought, I put the nest into Squire's porkmankle instead of into my handkerchief. And I forgot the nest when I put the porkmankle down, and give it a shake, through being so deep in thought."

"But what were you thinking about so deeply?"

"Tryin to puzzle it out why the pot-bellied man called me a fool."

And Jack looked as if the question still perplexed him.

"Fool, or no fool, Jack, you have done what none of the rest of us had the wit or pluck to do. But he will kill you, if ever he gets well enough to do it."

"If I live till he kills me, I shall be a very old man," Jack replied, with immense scornfulness.

He had now stowed away his properties, some in his pockets, and some in a sack, which he slung over his shoulder, and stood ready for flight. We shook hands, and he said—

"Luke Barnby knows the way to my lodge."

Desirous as I was to return to the vicarage, it took me a long time to do so, for everybody was in the main street, talking and laughing over the

sudden break-up of the meeting summoned by the commissioner. Here I met one who had not been present, and wished to hear my account of the affair; there another, who had been present, and wanted to go over it again. A knot of young fellows dragged me into the White Hart, where they drank Daft Jack's health, and the health of the man who had "put him up to the trick." For no reason they had given me the credit of the device, nor did my plain denial quite remove their belief that I had a hand in the business. At last I got away from them, and found all quiet at the vicarage.

It had been agreed to act on the suggestion of the chief constable the following day, and he had engaged to protect the house during the night. Anna, as I had come to name her to myself, had recovered from the shock of the previous evening, and looked charming even with a cross of plaister on her brow. After I had told the true and full story of Daft Jack's achievement, the doctor and the parson prosed alternately, the one describing all the venomous insects known to man, I should think; the other giving instances from history, sacred and profane, of their intervention in human affairs, and seeming to have pleasure in recounting the torture inflicted on an unlucky wight, whose name I forget, by an enemy who had him smeared with honey, and exposed to the stings of bees and wasps. The vicar was too good a Christian to rejoice in the sufferings of the commissioner, but

I am sure he got some kind of consolation in the very particular description which he made of the torments of the other man.

Anna was unusually silent, which I hoped might be due to the same thought as kept me so, that of the parting to come on the morrow. I noted with secret delight that the songs she chose, when she went to the spinet at my request, were tinged with a sweet melancholy, which might be that of love.

Chapter IX

"I ASKED you to come out with me because there is something I must say before you return to Sandtoft." So I feebly began, as we paced the garden, now somewhat cleared of the mire and refuse brought by the flood, a few flowers lifting their heads to the July sun. "I told you the other night I loved you. I might never have dared to say it, but for the fear that I should not have another chance. Mistress Goel—Anna—do you, can you love me?"

She lifted her noble face a little, gave me a look which I could not understand, and then the eyelids drooped, as she answered with trembling lips—

"It would be only too easy to love you, Frank, but I am bound—betrothed already. Have patience with me, while I tell you my miserable story." She sat down, and I beside her, heavy-hearted.

"Years ago, my father and his dearest friend, Cornelius Vliet, agreed upon a marriage between me and his friend's only son. I shrank from the thought of it, and begged my father to allow me to refuse; but he laughed at what he took to be girlish perversity. He could not believe I had a repugnance against a young man, who was reckoned handsome, well-bred, brave, the heir to a

large fortune. And, indeed, I could say nothing against Sebastian, but only that I had the strongest dislike to be married to him, or to any man. My father so far yielded as to defer the matter awhile. Then he was seized and thrown into prison, and we knew his doom would be death, or lifelong imprisonment. Sebastian came to me, and offered to secure my father's escape—on one condition. I gave him my promise, and he fulfilled his own by lavish bribery, and, I must acknowledge, at the risk of his own liberty, perhaps his life. He accompanied us to Paris. There I saw and heard much more of his manner of living than I had known at home, and it was fearful and loathsome to me. My father assured me young men were no worse for—what was so offensive to me. I cannot tell you how dreadful I felt it to be to fail in duty and love toward my father, and to be so ungrateful to Sebastian for my father's life and freedom, but I could not keep my plighted word. I vowed that I would not be married until Sebastian changed his course. He did not upbraid or taunt me, or argue with me, but disappeared. For some months we have heard nothing of him. I supposed he had been disgusted with what he must think my ingratitude and fickleness; but yesterday my father received a letter from him, saying he has given up drinking and dicing and all evil ways, and is coming to claim his bride. He has decided to join Vermuijden, and to share our exile, and will quickly follow his letter. My

father is delighted. Forgive me, Frank, that I have not avoided you. I am guilty, I know. Forgive me."

I had been on the point to interrupt the story a dozen times; but seeing how hard Anna found the telling of it, I would not make it harder. Now I burst out. "Forgive her! Forgive the sun for shining, the flowers for blooming!" I told her how sorely my heart ached for her, but she must bear up bravely still. I would not hear of duty to her father in regard to this marriage. I declared that a promise so extorted could not bind her. To try to keep it would be to sin against herself, against the man, against her father, who must be made wretched by it in the end, against me, against love, against God. I told her I was sure she loved me a little, and I would never give her up. She was *mine*, and should be mine as long as she or I lived. Where the words came from I did not know, for I am commonly slow of speech, but they came hot and swift, and Anna looked up at me, as I stood over her (my feelings had raised me to my feet) smiling through swimming eyes, and said tremulously—

"You masterful Frank! I could almost believe you; but oh! it cannot be."

She rose to her feet in a sudden agitation. "Here is Sebastian!" she exclaimed, and I turned and saw him, accompanied by Doctor Goel, approaching us. After greeting had passed between Anna and him, the doctor said something

by way of introduction, and Vliet and I bowed, he looking as black as a thundercloud, and I, doubtless, equally so. I think he knew me his rival at first glance, and hated me accordingly. How heartily I detested him there are no words to express.

He was a fairly well-made man two or three inches below my height, with cold, bluish-grey eyes, rather closely set, a big mouth, thick-lipped, a low forehead, and cheeks somewhat bloated. That he had turned to sober and cleanly living I did not believe, or that he ever would, and my unbelief was warming to the heart. Having no part in the Dutch conversation, I left the three, and returned to the house, where I heard that Vermuijden was again at Sandtoft, and had sent Sebastian Vliet in command of six of his men to escort Doctor Goel and his daughter thither, with request that they would come with speed.

Within the hour the party was ready to set off, two of the Dutchmen carrying the baggage (except certain small boxes, which the doctor would not entrust to other hands), and the other three men with muskets, cutlasses, and pistols, going in front. Then came the doctor and Vliet, Anna and I last. As the landing-place, where they had left their boat in charge of one of their number, was not more than half a mile away, I hastened to take up the thread of our previous talk, but was baulked of my intent. At a spot where three roads met we encountered a crowd "riding the stang." At the head of the procession strode a fellow blowing a

horn; then a dozen others, beating pans and kettles with pokers and iron spoons; a bagpiper made a noise like pigs in a storm; a ragged rascal, sitting a donkey, carried a pole on which dangled a woman's smock. After this standard bearer followed an old horse, bestridden by a grinning woman, who held an enormous ladle, with which she merrily belaboured her husband, who rode behind her, his face turned to the horse's tail, pretending to work at a distaff. Two lads marched behind the couple on horseback, bearing a pole, on which rode a third, thumping a pan, and repeating—

"With a ran, tan, tan,
On my old tin can,
Mrs. Mooley and her good man,
She banged him, she banged him,
For spending a penny when he stood in need.
She up with a three-footed stool;
She struck him so hard, and cut him so deep,
Till the blood ran down like a new-stuck sheep."

A shouting, jeering rabble accompanied the cavalcade, making uproar with marrow-bones and cleavers, tongs, gridirons, and kettles, and some half-score of barking and yelping curs swelled the din. A prominent figure in the rout was Ducker's wife, who had gone crazy through the loss of her child. She skipped and screamed and laughed, now here, now there, almost as much the object of amusement to the mob as the henpecked husband and his shrew of a wife.

If the mad woman caught sight of Anna there would be trouble, I felt sure; so I pushed on,

hoping to avoid touch with the crowd, who would most likely turn by the road we had come, to make the circuit of the town. But the spectacle had some attraction for Vliet, who stood to see the crowd go by, saying with a laugh, "Ah! justitia de los cornudos!" from which I surmised he had seen the riding of the stang in Spain.

I asked Anna to urge the five Dutchmen forward, the boat being yet some four hundred yards away. As I feared, some of the mob stopped to stare at Vliet in his foreign costume, and this led to Ducker's wife perceiving Anna and me. She raised the cry, "Witches! witches!" and the crowd took it up instantly. I saw the vixen leap down from her charger to join the blacksmith's wife in the leadership of the gang, which followed us pell-mell. Then I ran for the boat, half carrying Anna, who at first hung back, imploring me to go to her father's rescue. As he had six men well armed to defend him—for the Dutchmen had faced about and behaved manfully, the two who had borne the baggage pitching it into the reed-bed that bordered the road, and taking to their weapons—I attended to nothing but Anna's safety. I had put her into the boat, and made the man understand that he must push out into the stream, and take shelter under the reeds, when the rest of our party came up, the mob at their heels, brandishing their pokers, gridirons, cleavers, and what not, encouraging one another with shouts of "The witch! Tear her to scotticks!" and savage curses.

With great coolness and quickness, the Dutchmen took in the condition of things, and faced the angry rabble, and two of them fired. Whether any one was hurt, I could not see, but the yelling mob was not even checked. On they came furiously, and for some minutes we were engaged in a confused hand-to-hand struggle, which would have ended, most likely, in our being forced into the river by sheer weight of numbers, but for a pistol-shot fired into the rear of the crowd, which took them by surprise, and scattered them a little. This gave the Dutchmen the chance to use their muskets, and as one of the leaders of the mob fell, the rest were somewhat daunted, and drew off a few yards. Then Luke ran from behind them, and took his stand by me. He it was who had fired the shot which saved us, having followed me with my pistols. In this lull of the storm, I tried to persuade the folk to go away; but I had scarcely begun to speak, when one of the men took a stride forward and hurled a gridiron at my head, which happily flew wide, for I leaped on him in the act, snatching him up, and tossing him into the reed-bed. But he had given the others a lead which they were quick to follow; all sorts of missiles hurtled about us, and one of the musketeers was struck and fell backwards into the river. We could do nothing for him, because another shower of knives, pots, and stones flew about us, and our assailants came on with a rush. I gave Vliet a hint, though I knew not whether he understood

English. He nodded, and spoke to his men. When the foremost of the crowd were right upon us, we drew apart swiftly, Vliet and three of the Dutchmen on one side, I and Luke and one of the Dutchmen on the other. The pressure of those behind sent five or six of the leaders headlong into the river, and we threw or thrust several more after them. The rest took fright, and ran like so many rabbits. I believe the discovery that the "witch" had vanished had as much to do with their panic as the loss of their boldest spirits, who were floundering in the water. As the rabble fled, I perceived that blood was spouting from my right wrist, and my strength going with it. I asked Luke to tie my handkerchief tightly round it, but that did no good; the handkerchief was a soaked rag in no time, and the blood still pouring. Luke in great alarm called for Doctor Goel, who came and ripped up my coat and shirt-sleeves, and placing a bit of wood on my arm some distance above the elbow, fastened it there with a bandage torn from my shirt. This marvellously staunched the bleeding, but I became queerly drowsy, and sat on the ground, overcome with languor. The doctor went from me to look at two fellows, dead, or badly wounded, who lay in the road.

The Dutchmen were chasing the men in the river, firing now and then, but everything was dreamlike to me, until I heard a light footstep behind me, which I knew was Anna's. Before I could turn round, I saw a movement in the reeds,

and then a face, the mad woman's face, glaring at me, or at some one behind me. The next instant she sprang from her hiding-place, knife in hand, and I, now roused from my stupor, rose to seize her. I caught her in my arms, but she bore me to the ground. She writhed and twisted; she clasped her hands round my neck, trying to strangle me; she bit my bare shoulder; but I had just sense and strength enough to hold her fast until I heard Luke say—

"Let go, Measter Frank—let go; I have her safe, and you're bleeding to death."

The next thing I knew was that the vicar stood near in his old gown, and he and everybody looked so solemn that I got the notion this was a funeral company, and I the person they meant to bury.

"You mustn't," I whispered. "I'm not dead."

Wine was produced in some mysterious way, and Anna held the horn to my lips. The draught revived me greatly, and they told me what had passed during my fainting fit. As soon as the crazy woman had been secured, Luke had run to the vicarage for wine, and had ordered the sexton to bring the bier as the handiest means of conveyance. The vicar had followed. The doctor had attended to my wounds, and given instructions for their future treatment, and now Vliet was impatient to be gone. So we said our adieux, and Anna's right hand lay for a moment in my left, and my lips touched it. Then the boat moved off, and I was carried to the vicarage.

Chapter X

NO one cares to read of sickness and pain (unless it may be those whose business it is to cure them), but I am in a manner compelled to say something of my wounds, else my story later on would be hardly understood. The cut in my wrist caused me much trouble by the third day, so much that I could scarcely forbear from ripping off the bandage. By-and-by the pain in my hand was almost intolerable. The hurts in my shoulder were painful too. The earlier wound broke out again, and the bite inflamed greatly, and a kind of fever came upon me, so that I grew light-headed at times, and hardly knew where I was, or what I said. When I was myself again, I fumed and chafed at my weak and helpless condition, and sometimes grew frightened lest the bite of the mad woman might communicate madness. I could not comprehend my own irritability and want of self-command. The servants enraged me by stealing in and out of my room so softly, and by speaking in sharp whispers which went to my brain like stiletto thrusts. Good Mr. Butharwick, who nursed me with nigh unsleeping care, nearly drove me crazy by bidding me not to think of subjects which disturbed me, and by talking of matters that in nowise concerned me. He had made some astounding discovery about the children of Israel, and how their destiny was

written in the sky, as also were the future of the true Church and the doom of Antichrist. Everything could be made plain to one who read the Bible and knew astrology, and my good tutor appeared to think I might be soothed by hearing these mysteries expounded. I refrain from blasphemous language about the Holy Scriptures, but I said things about the stars and star-gazing which hurt Mr. Butharwick grievously.

Dick Portington watched with me one night, and in my intervals of relief from pain, he told me how the commissioner had been carried away more dead than alive, but vowing vengeance on those who had caused his sufferings. Of fights between the Dutch and the Islonians he had much to tell; how the men of Haxey had driven off Vermuijden's men, thrown down their embankments, filled up the drains, burned carts and tools, and utterly destroyed their works in the south of the Isle; how an attack had been made on Sandtoft and repelled, some of the assailants falling into the hands of the Dutch, who had flogged them within an inch of their lives, and then turned them loose to shift as best they could, threatening worse punishment to the next batch of captives. This was done by order of the new commandant, Vliet, who was in high esteem with the Dutchmen on account of his boldness and cunning. Vermuijden had gone away to oversee another operation in Bedfordshire, leaving Vliet in full authority.

For the next two days I was in high fever, and

my guardians refused to give Dick another opportunity of conversing with me. Luke was my best nurse and companion in these days, for my stolid man was in love, and in love with Martha, Anna's maid. They contrived to meet somehow, whenever I gave him permission to cross to Sandtoft, which I was never loath to do. If he had asked leave to go seven times a week, I should not have said him nay. In fact, losing count of time as I sometimes did, by reason of weakness and wandering of mind, I would ask him if he meant to go to-day, and he would answer, "Lord love you, Measter Frank, an' 'twere but yesterday I fared across." Through Luke I heard of my love, and she sent me messages, and gave him directions about the treatment of my hurts and as to my diet. Luke it was who told me that her mother was an English woman, the daughter of a London merchant, who had gone into exile for conscience sake. Martha also was of English parentage, the child of a servant who had accompanied the family to the Netherlands. "Which accounts for her pastry-making," added Luke. Through Luke I heard that Vliet pressed his suit with ardour, Doctor Goel seconding him; but that I had a friend at court in the maid, who was a humble friend rather than a common servant, and hated Sebastian with a perfect hatred. I was surprised and perplexed to hear Sheffield had visited Sandtoft, and struck up a friendship with Vliet. This I could not understand, and it disquieted me.

At the end of a fortnight I could go about a little, but the wounds in the shoulder did not properly heal, and I recovered strength but slowly.

One day as I sat out on the lawn in front of the house, Luke near me, busied in cleaning a gun, an old woman, with a tattered shawl over her head and a basket on her arm, came feebly up the drive, now and then coughing asthmatically. In a wheezing voice she begged to be allowed to show me the contents of her basket. Luke gave her his stool, which she accepted with profuse gratitude, and then asked for a drink of water.

"Bring her a cordial, Luke," I said, as he went off to the kitchen.

As soon as he was out of hearing, the old woman said in Bess Boswell's voice.

"Send him away again when he returns. I must have a private word with you."

Sure enough, now I looked narrowly at her, I recognised the eyes, but the rest of the face was that of an aged woman.

"What is the meaning of this mummery, Bess?" I asked.

"Have you forgotten what I told you? It is dangerous for me to be seen speaking to you," she replied.

"No; but I can't for the life of me understand the danger," said I.

"Certainly you can't; but that does not alter the fact," answered she, in a tone rather scornful of my sagacity, I thought.

Luke came toward us with the cordial at this point, and I bade him leave us awhile, as the poor body had something to tell me of her affairs. He withdrew out of earshot, but remained within sight of us.

"Your man is quicker of apprehension than you," she said. "He doesn't know me, and he doesn't trust me. He is loading his gun, and keeping a watchful eye on me; a good servant, that. I wish you would take a leaf out of his book, and be on your guard against strangers. Two months ago I begged you to go away out of the Isle, and it is by the most wonderful luck you are alive to-day."

"I have been in danger once or twice; I do know so much."

Bess waved her hand loftily.

"I do not speak of mobs and crazy women; your enemies are much more formidable."

"Come now, Bess, drop this mysterious style, and tell a plain tale, if you have one. You mean that Sheffield owes me a grudge, and won't stick at trifles to pay it. I know that as well as you, and I am not shaking in my shoes about it."

Bess laughed. "One of your worst enemies is your confidence in bodily strength and pluck. Lord Sheffield is not blessed with the sharpest wits in the world, though he is more than your match in craftiness, but he has the help of a man as cunning as the devil."

"Do you mean the Dutchman, Vliet?" I asked.

Bess laughed again. "The Dutchman is a bulldog, and, if you are prudent, you will not go near his kennel. But you have to be on your guard against one who can intrigue. Let me tell you there are sworn accusations now at Castle Mulgrave that Daft Jack was your tool, and if the poor fellow is caught he will be made to confess that he was."

"But it is a lie!" I exclaimed.

"I wonder how many lies have been confessed on the rack," retorted Bess. "There is a charge against you—waiting for something to strengthen the case—of having resisted the King's authority at Thorne, and inciting others to do so. At the same time it is being whispered about among the common sort that you are a traitor to the Islonian cause, and to your father. The Dutch are told that you are their secret enemy, the instigator of the attacks made on them."

"But these stories are contradictory, the one of the other!"

"What does that matter? The effect of them is that you are looked upon with hate and disgust all round. You were in great favour with the people just after the Crowle flood, but they are in a different mind to-day. Tales are told of you in every alehouse which would be laughable, if they were not believed. All this is done on the chance that your enemy may be saved the trouble of your taking off; he is prepared to act himself, if they don't."

"But what motive can he have?" I asked, incredulously.

"To get money," she answered.

"Who is the man?"

"Before I tell you, I must have your word never to betray me—never to tell any one else, directly or indirectly."

"I give it you."

"The man is my father."

I laughed now. "Lord Bozzy," "cheating Bozzy," the gipsy rascal, whose feats and pranks were a perpetual and relishing jest all over the Isle! It was ridiculous to consider him in the light of a malignant, subtle enemy.

Bess gave me a contemptuous smile. "Do you happen to know that he has stolen a horse, and sold it afterwards to the man from whom he had stolen it? Did you ever hear of his being entertained as an honoured guest at the house of a magistrate, who had condemned him to the stocks a day or two before? Have you heard of his passing for a clergyman, London merchant, French traveller, and a dozen other characters, among people who knew him well, or thought they did? And if he can take in every dull-witted squire in the Isle just for mirth and play, what do you suppose he can't do, when he is to gain a fortune by doing it?"

On reflection, I admitted to myself that contempt for Boswell might be foolish, and passed at once to suspicion. What if this girl had been

employed to frighten me away? Her I did not suspect, but might she not have been allowed to hear this and that, in the hope that she would inform me, and so I might be driven out of the Isle? A fine fellow I should be to run for my life, because a wench cried Bugaboo!

"Well, Bess, I am infinitely obliged to you," I said; "but I am not likely to take to flight. If you are good enough to warn me of any scheme you may hear of, I shall be forearmed."

"Do you suppose my father imparts his plans to me, or any one? I may guess his design by some direction he gives; I may divine a purpose by watching him closely. He doesn't talk of doing a thing, he does it."

It was curious to see the sort of pride she had in the man whose plans she was endeavouring to thwart, pride mingled with fear.

We sat a little while in silence. Then Bess got up to go.

"You will not heed my warning? Oh, you are bewitched, or you would not lose house and land, scorn a fair damsel, who would be your loving, faithful wife, break your father's heart, risk your life, all for—an outlandish woman!"

"I believe you honest, Bess," I rejoined; "but is all this of your own motion?"

"And who should prompt me?" she asked.

"Nay, that I cannot guess."

"Nor ever will." And away she went without another word.

A day or two later, my father returned, looking worn and aged, so that my heart ached to see the change. He, on his part, was deeply concerned to find me weak and ailing, and sent Luke to Doncaster with a letter to a physician there, forbidding him to return until he could bring the doctor. When he heard that my wounds had been got in defending the Goels, he refrained from speech, but his looks were of sorrow and anger both.

Late in the evening he gave to Mr. Butharwick and me an account of what he had done to get the decision of the judges put in force against Vermuijden, but all in vain. At length he determined to appeal to the King himself, whose will made null and void the sentence of the law. He bribed some of his Majesty's attendants heavily, but could not for a long time obtain audience. The King was in such anxiety and excitement about the Queen's French servants, of whom he greatly desired to be rid, and to have them sent back to their own country, that he could think or hear of nothing else, unless it were of some means of laying hands on money, which he wanted sorely. So the courtiers and servants said. Nevertheless, my father followed the King, who was exceedingly restless, from one place to another, seeking a favourable occasion, and at last found it in a village near Cambridge. One of the King's gentlemen, who had taken my father's money, came to him at his lodging, reporting his Majesty to be in better

humour that evening, having had from his Grace of Buckingham a letter which satisfied him the mounseers would soon be packed off to France. Seeing him in this temper, the gentleman had presented my father's petition, which the King had read, and then signified that the petitioner might be admitted to his chamber.

"But as soon as I came into the King's presence," said my father, "I knew, by the scowl on his face, my plea had no chance of success. He did not condescend to speak to me until he had told his people I was from Lincolnshire, which Henry VIII. had declared the most disloyal county in England, which condemnation was justified in his own experience. And of this rebellious county, the worst part was the Isle of Axholme, where one of his commissioners had been vilely used of late. Then he went on to say that in his care for his subjects in that barbarous corner of his dominions, he had authorized a scheme for reclaiming many acres of soil now under water, and, pointing to me, he said, 'This fellow has dared to defy his King by opposing our gracious purpose, setting forth I know not what legal quibbles in the courts of law; and when he fails in his rebellious design, actually has the audacity to approach us in person.' Then he tore up the paper and threw it into the fire, and turned to me, saying, 'Go to the devil, and thank your stars you are not helped thither by a sword through your body.' Whereupon I was jostled out of the sacred presence."

After Mr. Butharwick had retired, my father opened out to me on the state of our affairs, and in a strain altogether new. The change was so great as to make me afraid of I hardly knew what. He, who was used to speak and act with so much resolution and masterfulness, now lamented his unwisdom in taking upon him the burdensome charge of the "solicitorship," and accused himself of wronging me thereby. I could scarcely believe my ears, and doubted whether I was awake or dreaming.

"I had confidence that a just cause must prevail in England, but I ought to have perceived that everything is changed in this country. A King, who despises the rights of his people in general, and flouts his Parliament, cannot be hindered of his will with a few landowners and poor folk in Axholme, when he is in dire straits for money, and can get it by trampling us underfoot. In my foolish confidence I have done a great wrong by encumbering the estate so heavily."

I knew not how to answer; babbled something about doing our utmost to repair the mischief.

"Happily, it is possible to do that," he replied. "There is no doubt that Mistress Ryther and her father will welcome you as a suitor for her hand in marriage. You may not be inclined for matrimony just at present, and there is no hurry, but you should lose no time in asking the lady's promise. That obtained, all our troubles are at an end.

And as soon as you are wedded I will go abroad, taking Butharwick with me, leaving the bride to queen it here. When I return, a house in Beltoft will suffice for me.

"Unfortunately, I cannot ask Mistress Ryther to marry me," I answered, "because I love another lady with every fibre of my body and every thought of my heart."

My father smiled. "You think so, Frank; and it is partly my fault. I ought to have turned you loose in town, sent you on the grand tour, given you a chance to prove how often we can be in love, and how quickly out of it again. 'Tis a malady incident to youth, a passing fever; but while the delirium lasts, we see and converse with angels. Change of air is a cure for it."

How I threw scorn on this scorn of love, how I protested and vowed my love could not die, may be imagined by a lover, and no other would care to read such matter.

My father replied, with an indulgent smile, "Yes, yes, my son, I know. But you must see that marriage with the Dutch girl is out of the question. You have nothing to marry on. If you refuse Mistress Ryther, you are a landless, penniless man. Even if it were otherwise, how can you wed the daughter of a fellow who broke prison and fled his country, sooner than take his trial for conspiracy to murder his Prince? A pretty family connection for the master of Temple Belwood! You might as well propose to marry a gipsy; better

indeed, for your own people would not burn the house over your head for that, as they certainly would, if you took a wife from the camp of the Dutch invaders. Besides, the girl is mated already —or as good as mated—with a rascal who was drummed out of King Christian's army for cheating at dice. You see I have taken some pains to inform myself about your Fancy and her associates."

"And who is your informant, may I ask?"

"A Frenchman, Chavatte by name, a gentleman and a man of affairs, who came over with Vermuijden, putting much money into the business. I met with him at Cambridge, where he was seeking Vermuijden, as I was seeking the Lord's Anointed. He has withdrawn from the company for good reasons. For one thing, he is convinced that the plan for the drainage is fatally defective, and Vermuijden will not hear of alteration. Then he has discovered that the King has sold what never belonged to him, and has no mind to be a receiver of stolen goods, nor does he expect that the rightful owners will ever submit to the robbery. And he has the strongest distaste to Vermuijden's lieutenant and deputy. He is trying to recover some of his money, and will shortly go home. You will be inclined to consider him a man of sense, for he admires Mistress Goel's beauty, and applauds her devotion to her father, whom he regards as lunatic, most especially because he desires to give her in marriage to this Vliet. 'But he finds favour with

the incomprehensible sex,' Chavatte added, with his French shrug of the shoulders."

I did not speak for some time. A horrible doubt had crept into my mind. Suppose Anna's filial piety should overcome her repugnance to Sebastian Vliet. Suppose the fellow had reformed his conduct. Suppose he succeeded in gaining her consent. If Anna were lost to me, what mattered it to me whether I married Mistress Ryther, or a gipsy, or a blackamoor? If I could redeem the dear old place, and make my father happy, was it not my duty to do so? Always supposing that Anna could not, or would not be my wife. It was the first time I had given way to despondency, and even now I do not understand what it was that plunged me into gloom.

One thing only was clear to me, that I must see Anna without delay, and learn whether I was to be blessed or miserable for the whole of my life. I could not keep before myself that I had nothing to offer for her acceptance, or that her father might treat the offer with ridicule. I could think of nothing but the necessity to see Anna, and hear the word which should decide my fate. My father said nothing to interrupt my meditations. Since he had been away from home, he had formed the habit of smoking, and he now lighted his pipe and puffed silently. When he had finished his pipe and knocked out the ashes, he said—

"I will not press you for an answer to-night; but it is to be remembered that handsome young

women, who have heaps of money, are not as plentiful as blackberries in September."

"I will give you an answer to-morrow evening," I replied; but did not say anything of my intention to go to Sandtoft in the morning, for I felt certain my father would oppose it strongly. Indeed, what with the lightness of my head and the heaviness of my heart, it took me some time to get upstairs and to bed. Luke, who was accustomed to help me, was away, and it occurred to me that if I missed him to-night, I should miss him much more to-morrow.

Chapter XI

AS I was about to turn in to bed, I perceived a red glare in the sky westward, and feared it meant trouble at Sandtoft, so I lay long awake; but at length weariness overpowered me, and I slept for some hours. I awoke early, and, having dressed in a slow, fumbling way—my arm being more than usually painful—I walked out as if I sought the morning air, taking care to give no inkling of my purpose to the servants, who were already astir.

At that time of the year, the middle of August, there was choice of three modes of crossing the fen. One might pick one's way on stilts, or with cleat-boards, but in my present weakness I dared not adventure either method. The third course was to take boat at Belshaw, on a winding stream, which in the end joined the Idle a mile or so above Sandtoft. Luke had told me that the Idle was flowing again since the destruction of Vermuijden's work in the south of the Isle, so I chose the easiest, if slowest, manner of going; but when I reached the little inn at Belshaw, there was no boat to be had. Dame Drury told me their boat was at the carpenter's under repair, and the flat-bottomed punt Drury had taken out, meaning to try for half-duck and snipe, which had begun to appear in the

fen. There was nothing for me but to await his return, which would be early or late, according to his luck in fowling.

While the dame got ready a breakfast for me, she chanced to make mention of her husband's cousin, who had lain at their house for a year, crippled with a kind of palsy. Half in curiosity, half in compassion, I questioned her, and learned that he was about thirty years of age, that he had inherited a moderate property on the death of his father thirteen years ago, and had gone out to see the world, seeking knowledge and adventure in many countries. Some twelve months before this time he had arrived in London, intending to visit his friends in the Isle, and then to go to Virginia to join Captain John Smith (who was a distant kinsman of the Drurys); but he had been suddenly struck down by a mysterious disease, and now lay helpless in an upper room. On my asking whether the poor fellow would welcome a visitor, she went to inquire, while I took my meal, and came back with the message that he would be very glad to receive me.

At first sight my heart warmed to him, though what was the secret of his charm for me I do not know. Do we ever know what it is which draws us toward another? He had a handsome face, but his eyes only were remarkable. The broad brow was crowned with clusters of dark hair; mouth and chin were hidden under moustachios and beard, but the eyes glowed. There was

witchery in his smile, as he extended his thin hand, saying—

"This is a day to be marked with a white stone. I have often heard of you, but little expected ever to see you in my den."

I gripped the hand, with a choking in my throat to see such a man a prisoner, and said—

"If I had known, I would have come earlier."

"I thank Dame Fortune that you have come now," said he.

He had made his poor little room a wonderful place. On the walls were many sketches, pencilled from memory chiefly, as I came to know afterwards, full of life and spirit. Quaint drawings, the expression of his humorous fancy, there were also. A few well-thumbed books in several languages stood at his bed's head. On the table lay papers covered with mathematical studies. He followed my glance, and said—

"The hours are not so leaden-footed as you might fear. With books and pencil and a questioning habit of mind, one need not be idle."

"But accustomed to liberty and travel——" I began.

"And, therefore, with store of remembrances," he interrupted. "I used to roam the field and browse; now I lie and chew the cud. You may laugh when I tell you that my worst plague is the perpetual swarm of flies. At times their buzzing and their touch nearly madden me. The idlest, foulest, most impudent and vilest things on earth,

no wonder the Bible ascribes their creation to Beelzebub. You don't happen to know what is the proper sacrifice to offer him? I should make it, if he would be favourable to me, and remove his creatures from me."

"The dame would prepare you a paper to catch them."

"Don't speak of it! She did, and the horror of it abides with me. But one thing I learned therefrom. The priests are wrong with their doctrine of everlasting torment. Why, I could not endure the miserable struggles of the most loathsome and detestable and worthless insects. *A fortiori*."

"Questions of divinity are beyond me," I said, laughing.

"Whereas questions of all sorts are my occupation," he answered.

Then the conversation turned on his travels, and he talked of men and things in nearly all the countries of Europe. He seemed to have made friends wherever he had been, and had something to say of the virtues of every people. He had seen with his own eyes and judged for himself, and spoke with a delightful freshness. Many a droll prank he had played in his desire to see things from the inside, here to get into a mosque, there to penetrate into a brigand's cave, and he told his escapades briefly and lightly, as I had never heard man speak before in my life. Despite my longing to be away to Sandtoft, the time passed quickly in his company, and we took our luncheon together

pleasantly. But when two o'clock, three o'clock struck, and Drury did not appear, I grew restless and uneasy, and made some excuse for going out.

"As you will," said he; "but if you want only a vent for your impatience, pace about, and swear a little. It is long since I have had the pleasure to watch a lover."

"And who tells you I am one?"

He laughed as I have never heard another man laugh, softly, musically.

"Oh, my friend, the name is writ all over you. A blind beggar's card is not so readable. Sighs, fits of silence, eager hearkening for means of flight —a dozen signs make it plain. And besides, what could take a wounded man, still ailing no little, across the fen to Sandtoft, of all places in the world—but Love, the strongest of the most ancient gods, venerable as Chaos and Mother Earth and the Nether Deep?"

"You speak like a votary," said I.

"Ay, of the god; not, like you, of the priestess. The deity is one; his ministrants are many."

To me this was a jangling and jarring note, but there came to my ears the sound of Dame Drury's voice in grumbling welcome of her husband, so I bade my new friend "Good day," and hurried downstairs.

I had difficulty in getting the loan of the punt. Drury had this, that, and the other to do to-morrow. There was "a plenty of fowl" about, which would

fetch good prices so early in the season, and he distrusted my assurance of return that evening; and even hinted doubt of ever seeing the punt or me again, if he allowed me to take it to Sandtoft, where "the Dutchees are as mad as bees when their skep has been upset." "Would he sell it outright?" I asked, impatient of the waste of time in wrangling. No; he wouldn't do that, because the price of the punt would not cover the loss of time while a new one was being put together. "Take any price you please," said I, and at five o'clock stepped into the punt, and began to pole down stream. I could not ply two poles by reason of the weakness of my right arm, so I got forward but slowly. Several times I was compelled to use both arms to the single pole where the water was very shallow, or the weeds grew rank; and heavy work I found it, so heavy that after an hour's toil, I was taken with a kind of swimming in the head, and lay down in the bottom of the punt to rest awhile. I know not whether I fell asleep or fainted, but when I came out of slumber or swoon, the light had faded, and a gentle shower was falling. I suppose the rain on my face awoke me. I pushed on, but so feebly that darkness overtook me before I reached Sandtoft, for the thickening rainclouds cut off the twilight. When I came to the settlement I got out at the first convenient spot for landing, and, having moored the punt, walked slowly and cautiously along the bank to find the gate. Suddenly a lantern flashed in my face, and

my arms were seized from behind and pinioned. My captors hurried me forward, exchanging a few words in their own language, but saying nothing to me.

Shortly, I was thrust into a bare room, lighted by a lamp slung from a hook in the planking overhead, where Vliet and three others sat, smoking, round a table, on which stood two or three square bottles, several glasses, and a pitcher of water. The closeness of the room with the reek of tobacco and odour of Schiedam was choking and sickening, and all things began to go round; but I pulled myself together by strong effort of will, for something warned me that I must have my wits about me here. While Vliet and the others talked in Dutch, one of the men loosed my bonds, and on looking down I saw my right hand was red, and then felt a slow trickling down the arm. Now I understood my faintness. My wound had broken out again, and loss of blood had weakened me.

The man who had cut the cord which tied my arms now searched me, as if he supposed I had weapons hidden under my clothing. In so doing, he stripped off my coat, and finding my shirt sleeve soaked in blood, looked in my face narrowly, and then made some remark to Vliet, which caused him to take the lantern from one of the men and poke it against my nose. He sat down after the inspection, and laughed until his face grew purple. Then he poured out a huge glassful of spirit, half

of which he took down at a gulp, and laughed again. When his fit was over, I said—

"You recognise me, I believe, Mynherr Vliet?"

He could speak English, I found, though abominably, and with a drunken stutter.

"Oh yes, mister—devil take your name! I know you."

"You cannot suppose that I came to Sandtoft with any ill intent."

"By heaven and hell, but I can suppose it, and be sure of it. Thousand devils, yes. You are a spy, a traitor, a Judas."

Then he turned to his men, gabbling fast to them in Dutch, finally issuing an order to one of the men, which he went out to execute.

"These hurts got in defending your people should certify you, M. Vliet," I said, pointing to my shoulder.

"Ah! you are crafty, Mister—Judas. You fight a little in the daylight for us, that you may plot against us in the dark. You designing devil!"

Although I knew, looking at Vliet's countenance, in which raging hatred was no less visible than drunkenness, that there was but a step between me and death, I could not refrain from smiling at the character he gave me.

"You laugh! You will look very funny when you are hanged!" he said.

"Be sure of this," I said, speaking slowly, and as plainly as I could, if perchance some of the Dutchmen might have English enough to take my

meaning: "if you hang me, you will be hanged, and every man who aids you."

I saw by the look of one of the fellows that he understood me. He whispered to Vliet, who looked up and asked—

"What lie have you to tell why you came here?"

"I came to speak with Doctor Goel and his daughter on private business."

"Under cover of darkness, like a thief! You creep on the bank at an unguarded place. To see the doctor! Liar!"

"I set out early this morning, but was hindered by the way, and, being fatigued, I got out of my boat at the first spot I touched."

I saw I had somewhat impressed the one man, for he asked Vliet a question, in which he mentioned the doctor's name, to which the answer was a roaring negative; and as he gave it, Vliet took a pistol from a drawer under the table, and looked at the man threateningly. Then he turned to me.

"You are a liar. Your Lord Sheffield told me how you are cunning. You pretend to be a friend of some of our people that you may get knowledge of our work and our defences. Then you send your rascals to burn and destroy, as they did last night. I hanged two of them, and I will hang you. Your English law!—that for it!"—snapping his fingers. "You are a rebel against your King; and an English lord will stand my friend."

He swallowed another fiery draught. I began to think my chance of life was small. Vliet might

or might not really believe I was the instigator of attacks on the settlement, but he had the word of Sheffield for it, and would doubtless have Sheffield's men ready to swear it, if so it pleased his lordship. Vliet's real motive could be well hidden under pretence of summary justice on a public enemy. There was, however, a possibility which had not occurred to him; I would put it to him. All this passed through my mind before Vliet placed his empty glass on the table.

"Have you any witnesses to prove that Lord Sheffield told you I raised rioters against you? Because if you have not, when you have gratified him by putting me out of the way, he will not lift a finger to keep you out of the hangman's clutches. He will deny that he ever said such things, and laugh in your face."

For a moment he was staggered, but he was too far gone in liquor to be able to think.

"Bah! you are a lying devil!" he said.

At this moment, the man whom he had sent out returned to say, as I understood, that everything was ready. I took a glass from the table, rinsed it out with water from the pitcher, filled it again, and drank. I was inclined to shiver, and the fellow might think I trembled with fear. Vliet gave a signal, and I was led out into the open. Several men stood by, with flaming torches and cressets in their hands, and by these lights I saw the gallows overhead, from which a rope dangled. The noose was slipped over my head. Some men spat on

their hands and seized the other end of the rope, ready to haul upon it; and I closed my eyes to pray the publican's prayer, when a loud cry in the dearest voice in the world roused me. The crowd parted, and Anna came up to the foot of the gallows, saying something in Dutch with an imperious tone. The men slacked the rope, one of them giving it a turn or two round a peg in the upright. Then followed a rapid conversation between Anna and Vliet, with an accompaniment of murmuring voices from the bystanders. I understood no word, but by tones and gestures I knew that Anna began in indignation and anger, but was driven to pleading. Then the doctor came up and joined in the talk, addressing himself to his daughter chiefly. It ended in Anna allowing Vliet to take her hand, repeating a sentence which he seemed to dictate. Anna now made as if to come to me, but Vliet barred the way; and there ensued an altercation, which again ended in Vliet having his will. Anna went reluctantly away with her father, and I was conducted to the room to which I had been taken at first.

When we—that is, Vliet and I and his three toping companions—re-entered the room, one of them handed me my coat, but I did not put it on, for it was drenched with the rain. He then found a horse-blanket, threw it over my shoulders, and offered me the spirit-bottle. Seeing him thus far well inclined, I asked for bread, and he produced some, which I munched before helping myself to

a small quantity of the liquor. It made me shudder to drink it, but it put life and warmth into me. All this time Vliet lay back in his chair in a sort of stupor, consequent, I imagined, on his having been in the fresh air after so much gin-drinking. After awhile he roused himself and took a dram. Then he lighted his pipe and began to talk to his comrades in a snuffling manner, and thickly. By-and-by he turned to me—

"I spare your life; I will not hang you. Why do you not kneel down and kiss my boots? Where is your gratitude for my mercy?"

As I did not answer the inquiry, he continued—

"Stupid pig! But I will make you speak. I have given my word to my wife—my *wife*, you understand—that I will not hang you; but I will crop your ears and slit your nose. Thousand devils, yes! And then I will kick you out into the fen, and if you die there that will not be my fault."

"If you want revenge on me, take it like a man," I answered. "You have a knife in your belt; give me one and let us fight. You are half drunk, but I have only my left arm, and am otherwise weak. Come, be a man."

And I stood up, for I desired nothing better than a duel to the death. Life without Anna was nothing worth, and if I could by any chance kill him, she would be freed from the loathsome brute. The other Dutchmen jabbered among themselves and to Vliet, and, as far as I could understand,

they backed my demand for a fight. Perhaps they would not greatly grieve, if the bully got the worst of it. He scowled savagely round on us all, poured out more gin and drank it, let his pipe fall to the floor, drew his knife, and came at me. But he had drunk too much to be dangerous. One blow between the eyes sent him to the ground like a log, and he lay there senseless. The friendly Dutchman took me by the arm and led me to Doctor Goel's house.

Chapter XII

MARTHA opened the door to us so quickly as to give me the notion she had been waiting behind it in expectation of our coming. She showed me into a room which looked wondrous comfortable after the one I had just left; and a cold chicken, bread, and a bottle of wine were pleasant things to see, for I had the hunger of a famishing dog. Anna came in, and compelled me to sit down to eat and drink, untidy and dirty as I was, with the horse-blanket round my body. She would not suffer me to talk much, and Martha bustled in with fresh supplies until I declared I could eat no more. Then the doctor came to examine my arm. He whistled as he laid it bare.

"How droll you English are!" he exclaimed. "To think of using an arm in this condition! But, after all, it is fortunate you did."

Then, with much learned language, he endeavoured to explain to me how well it was that my wound had broken out afresh. He bathed and cleansed the arm, anointed and tied it up, talking all the time to Anna and Martha, who stood by to hand him things he wanted; but I was too heavy to pay attention, being half asleep before he had done with me. I felt some surprise at the appearance of Luke on the scene, but he had me speedily to bed.

Late the next day I awoke, brighter and fresher than I had been for many days, but exceedingly feeble. Luke brought me a draught of some strange kind of beer, which revived me greatly, and when I had taken it, he told me how he had returned late yesterday from Doncaster with the physician, and found everybody at Temple Belwood in much trouble about my disappearance. No one had surmised I might be gone to Sandtoft, but Luke naturally guessed my purpose; so, taking pole, lantern and cleat-boards, he made off to Belshaw, where he heard of my doings, and struck across the fen in a bee-line for the settlement. He had only to make the signals which had been agreed on between him and Martha, a whistle like that of the grey plover, followed by an owl's cry, to bring his sweetheart to their trysting place, but was confounded to learn that nothing had been seen or heard of me at Doctor Goel's. Prowling cautiously about, Martha keeping watch, he found the punt, and having this assurance of my being in the neighbourhood, he returned to Martha. As they entered within the palisade through an opening concealed by a clump of willows, a flare of cressets and torches showed me and my conductors going from the guard-room to the gallows, and they hurried to the doctor's house with the news. What followed is already written.

When I spoke of going home, the doctor took a tone of authority, and vowed he would detain me, by force, if need were, until he had satisfied him-

self I ran no more danger of losing my arm. I made no stout resistance, but despatched Luke to Temple to set my father's mind at ease, and bring me a change of clothing and other matters of which I stood in need, and settled myself down in the doctor's household most contentedly. A marvellous change had come over me, which may have been due to the removal of the venom from my blood, as the doctor affirmed, or to my being under the same roof with Anna, as I inclined to believe. No one seemed to apprehend further trouble from Vliet, and I began to doubt whether my experience of the previous evening had been real or only a nightmare. Doctor Goel sat in his own room, pipe in mouth, over leaves and roots and such like rubbish, now and then coming out to ask me questions, giving as his reason for so doing that I had a quick eye, and a habit of observation remarkable in one unskilled in the sciences, but I thought his true intent was to hinder my being alone with his daughter, albeit there was small chance of that, for Anna had housewifely duties (or made them), which caused her to be going and coming continually. Now it was to make up medicine for her father's patients; now to confer with Martha about kitchen matters; now to look out old clothing for some of the poorer sort among the settlers; always something to break off our converse as I approached the topic nearest my heart. So, despairing of a talk with her for the present, I made bold to interrupt the doctor in his curious pastime. He

bore the interruption courteously, though he sighed as he put down his glass and ceased to pore over the stuff on the table. I asked him whether Vliet had abandoned his drunken freak at Mistress Goel's intercession.

"Freak? That is joke, is it not?" he replied. "It was no joke, Mr. Vavasour. Sebastian was enraged by the mischief done on the previous night, and he would have hanged you, but for my daughter's intervention. Oh yes. Perhaps he would have endangered his own neck. I know not. The law appears to be in abeyance in this part of England. But Sebastian would have taken his chance of that. It was inconvenient for you at the time, but what says your proverb? 'All's well that ends well.' My daughter was at hand to save your life. I was at hand to save your arm. I have the satisfaction to be of some service to a gentleman who has laid me under obligation. And there is now an end to a misunderstanding between my daughter and her affianced husband. She has consented to marriage within three months, and I have some hope of being permitted to return to my own country by that time. So 'all's well,'" the doctor concluded, smiling.

Married within three months! I wished Luke had lost his way, or Vliet had been more stubborn. What was my life worth to me, Anna being lost? But chained to a drunken ruffian! Better far, if I had been strangled last night. It could not be. It should not be.

I know not how my outward bearing betrayed my feelings, but the doctor perceived something of them, for he went on—

"There is a little irregularity, almost impropriety, in what I am about to say, but there will be mutual advantage, perhaps. I am aware you admire my daughter, and imagine yourself in love with her. Stay: listen to me for a short time. Doubtless you would describe your feeling in stronger terms. We will say you love her. Consider, will you, please, how impossible it is that her father should entertain a proposal of marriage from you. Your inheritance of your father's estate depends on your father's pleasure, if I am rightly informed?" (Who had informed him? I asked myself, as I nodded.) "The estate is heavily burdened, or so I am told?" Again I nodded, and wondered. "But, supposing your prospects were as good as they appear to be bad, could I consent to my daughter's being buried in a half-savage region like this? Could I allow her, esteemed as an ornament of the most intellectual society of Europe, to become the despised associate of fat farmers' wives, to whom the sale of poultry and butter is the main business of life, and whose amusements are coarse and frivolous in the extreme? It would be an unheard of folly on my part, even if there were no precontracted arrangement for my daughter's settlement in life. But it so happens she is affianced to a gentleman of large fortune, who has shown the sincerity of his attachment by striking

proofs" ("And particularly last night," I murmured to myself), "not the least being that he has forsaken agreeable scenes and companions to endure exile to be near the lady of his choice."

I could hold my tongue no longer.

"You have brought Mynherr Vliet into discussion, doctor, so you must pardon me for asking whether you believe any lady can love the drunken brute? And, if not——"

"There is no need to treat the matter hypothetically," the doctor interrupted. "I can assure you my daughter has all the affection for Mynherr Vliet which her betrothed could reasonably look for. We are somewhat indelicate to touch on such a subject, but as I desire to clear away any delusion which may exist in your mind, I give you my word that any inclination toward yourself which you may have imagined, was nothing more than a passing sentiment. Young women of a certain turn of mind, nourished by poetry and the drama, are apt to entertain a transient fancy for a handsome young man, encountered in new scenes, especially when they are somewhat piqued by the supposed desertion of the accepted lover."

I looked at the old gentleman, who smiled on me benignly, as if confident in his knowledge of the heart of woman, and wondered whether he could by any possibility be right. Or was he deluding himself about his daughter's happiness, because he longed so much himself to be restored to home and friends and congenial pursuits? It

might be true enough that Anna did not really love me, that I could well believe; but it was incredible she could love a beast like Vliet. While I sat silent, word was brought of Vermuijden's arrival, and of his wish to see the doctor and Anna. So I was left alone to ruminate. Some things which the doctor had said puzzled me not a little. As for what he had spoken against the Isle, I cared not a jot, nor was I much troubled about the low state of my fortune, which, in my youthful confidence, I hoped to mend in no long time. Could he be speaking truth when he said that Anna really chose to become the wife of Vliet? That was the question. I could not but think that her avoidance of me pointed that way. And yet, what passed near the gallows looked rather as if she gave her word to Vliet out of pure desire to save my life. But that promise, extorted under threat, and a threat which Vliet himself could not in his sober senses attempt to justify, could not be held binding. It was absurd to think it a sacred pledge. Nor could I believe Anna light-minded and fickle, even if her father accused her. Only one thing was clear to me—that I must have speech with Anna. While I sat pondering, I heard a knock at the door, and the buxom Martha came in to say Luke had returned and awaited my pleasure. Her bright, honest face was good to see, and I fell into talk with her. I asked her whether she had heard what passed between Mistress Goel and Vliet last evening.

"Nearly all, sir," she answered, "and wished I was a man for the first time in my life."

"Why so?"

"That I might have the strength to kill him then and there for torturing the brightest, sweetest lady on earth."

"He demanded a promise that she would marry him within three months, did he not?"

"Oh yes. He took no heed of reason or warning. He said you should die, whatever might afterwards happen to him, unless she gave him her word on the spot before witnesses."

"And Doctor Goel can think his daughter will be happy with him!" I said to myself, in amazement.

"Oh, the doctor!" cried Martha contemptuously. "He has wasted his brains on weeds and creeping things, until he has none left to understand his fellow-creatures with. He thinks of Sebastian Vliet as he used to be, before his cheeks were bloated and his hands shaky. Then the doctor has lost his money, or as good as lost it, in this mad business, and he wants to make up the loss to my mistress. He thinks Vliet has plenty of it, and hasn't sense to see that money melts like snow in April, when it is in the hands of a drunken gambler. And that is what Vliet is. Every night, when Vermuijden is away, he is toping and playing—and losing, for the men he plays with know all his tricks and more. Then he is rooked by the lord who comes to see him, and by another rascal who fetches and carries for the lord. Vliet's

money is going at a great rate. But what does Vliet matter?"

"He seems to be of some importance, since he has Mistress Goel's word to marry him, and her father is well pleased it should be so."

"And what does that avail against a gentleman who loves her? Every lover I've heard of snapped his fingers at foolish old people, pinked his rival, and rode off with the lady."

"Unluckily," thought I, "one needs a purse as well as a rapier for that, and somewhere to ride to." What I said was: "But the lady must consent before even the hero of a ballad can run away with her."

"Consent!" repeated Martha. "And what's a lover good for, if he does not save her the trouble of consenting, cut all arguments short by stopping her mouth, and have it out with her parents when the ring is on her finger and the happy blush on her cheek? You may think me a bold hussy to talk so. But I know what I know. And my heart is sore to hear sobbing and praying all last night, and to see the dear angel with swollen eyelids, and a pitiful quiver on her lips this morning. One thing is certain, Sebastian Vliet will never call her wife. If he escapes drunken surfeit, shooting by the men he bullies, the knife of a boozing companion, the Almighty's lightning, I'll put ratsbane in his meat myself."

She looked as if she meant it, her face pale, her eyes glowing.

"Shall I send Luke to you, sir?" she asked in another voice.

Luke had much to tell me, but the sum of it was that my father's displeasure over my visit to Sandtoft and my continuance there was great; and Mr. Butharwick had charged Luke to entreat me to return without delay, the good old man being much alarmed by my father's anger. Neither had heard of my narrow escape from the gallows, as I had forbiden Luke to mention it.

Not until the evening of the next day did I get five minutes talk with Anna, who avoided me with astonishing skill; but, by Martha's help, I contrived to meet her as she came out of a house which was used as a hospital for sick and wounded Dutchmen. Even then she tried to escape me, but I would take no nay. She must go with me where there might be a talk without interruption, and that was on the river. When she had yielded, and we had got into a boat, she began to speak of her hope that the feud between the Dutch and the Islonians might be abated by a measure agreed upon at the council held the previous evening. Large pay was to be offered to such of the natives as could be induced to labour in cutting trenches, rearing embankments and carrying material. If the labour should not be directly profitable, the employment of it might help toward more amicable feeling. I suffered her to speak on, well knowing who had advised this course, until we came to a broad water with a small bank in mid-

stream, on which grew an old birch tree. I ran the boat close under the tree, gave the painter a twist or two round an overhanging bough, shipped the oars, and took my turn to speak.

"The questions between Dutch and Islonians will keep, but not the question between us two. You know I love you, Anna. I can't tell you so in fine language, but never man loved woman more since the beginning of the world, or ever will to the end of it. I am a plain, rough fellow, and I have nothing to offer you but my love—not money, or land, or rank, or anything; but I will make or cut my way to something, please God, if you will come to me when I've done it. I think you love me, but you have never said so. Say 'I love you, Frank,' and——"

She stopped my long speech with one word—"Cruel!" and burst into weeping.

Then I nearly capsized the boat. It was a slight crazy thing, and my weight considerable, but I scrambled to her side, and, putting my arm round her, drew her head on to my breast. She did not see how narrowly we escaped an overturn, nor did she resist my embrace, but went on sobbing, as though her heart would break.

Then I found out that one can be heavenly happy and full of sorrow at the same time, for every sob of hers seemed to tear my bosom, while I knew not how to contain my joy. When she had recovered breath a little, she made as if to withdraw herself, but that I would not allow.

"But, Frank, I shall be doubly, trebly perjured, and grieve and shame my father beyond endurance."

"Say 'I love you, Frank,'" I insisted.

At last she did, and hid her blushing face against my breast. Then I told her—what I shall not repeat. And in a great trembling, I gave her a blundering, clumsy kiss. How long I should have talked in my rapture, trying to hearten my love, I know not, but the sun set without our perceiving it, until the deepening dusk made Anna exclaim about the time. So I took the oars and rowed away from the loveliest islet in the world. Martha stood at the door, watching for our coming, and as we entered the house, she seized my hand and lifted it to her lips.

Chapter XIII

THE doctor had been summoned to a conference with his chief, so I had hope we might have a long evening to ourselves, but Anna nipped it in the bud.

"Fortune is kind," said she. "I will give you something to eat, and then you must away home."

"Away home? Why?" I demanded.

"Because my father will be very angry when he knows what we have done."

"The more reason I should stay with you."

"Oh, you stupid Frank! Do you think he will beat me? But, if you are here, he will say things he will one day be sorry for—things you may find it hard to forgive. Whereas, if I have him alone, I can coax, or scold, or cry, as may be needed, and bring him to reason."

"Running away does not suit me," said I.

"Nor would I send you away, if you could do the least good. There is nobody to be knocked down or thrown into the river just now; only an elderly gentleman to be managed. And there is another at Temple Belwood impatient to see his son. Go and do your best with him, leaving my father to me."

In the end I consented. I called Luke to prepare things for my going, and he had to tell me

that a tract of the fen from Sandtoft, almost direct to Belton, had been recently flooded to a depth of two to three feet by the raising of an embankment for a drain which had been begun. In a light boat one might cross more easily and quickly than had been possible heretofore.

"Why not walk on the embankment?" I asked.

It seemed the bank was rough, and there would be awkwardness here and there in the growing darkness and a rising mist. So we settled on the boat as my conveyance. While we talked, Anna had made haste to provide supper for me, eager to have me gone, nor would she permit me to linger over the meal, or afterwards. I wanted to talk of our future, but she would not.

"Have you a ninepence?" she asked. "Rustic lovers break one, do they not?"

I broke one, and held out the halves to her.

She took one, and said, laughing, "Now we are properly plighted; what need of more words? When you bring your token, mine will be ready."

Rosy-red she blushed, as I took her in my arms, and held her against my quick-beating heart, and joined lip to lip. But she withdrew herself, cut short our leave-taking, and dismissed me.

I found Luke waiting for me with the little boat, and stepped in, bidding him stay at Sandtoft till morning, and bring me word of Mistress Goel then. He raised some objection to my going unattended, but I overruled him, and doubtless the prospect of a longer confab with Martha disposed

him to obedience. He had put a lighted lantern into the boat, which would be useful, he reminded me, when I came to the will-pits. The will-pits were pools, reputed bottomless, half surrounded by very old birches, some still green, others fallen and rotting. Now the fen was under water, the trees might be plaguy unless I had a light, for the night was darker than nights are wont to be in August.

Thanking my good fellow for his care, I bade him good night, and sculled off rapidly, keeping well away from the embankment, lest there should be timbers near the foot of it. When I had gone about a mile, as I reckoned, I stopped sculling to pick up the lantern, and held it forward on the lookout for the will-pit trees. As I did so, I perceived that the boat drifted backwards and a little toward the embankment. How could there be a current in a sheet of standing water? But a current there certainly was, and running pretty strongly too. The Dutchmen could not be at work at this time of night, opening the sluice for any purpose that I could conjecture. There might be a defect in the embankment somewhere, a crack which was widening under pressure of water. Whatever might be the secret, my best course was to go on as fast as I could scull; so I took both in hand, pulling with all my might. Up to this time I had used only one scull over the stern, sparing my weaker arm. Not more than five minutes later the sculls scraped bottom and the boat stuck

fast. Shipping oars, I leaned over the side, lantern in hand, and saw there were but a few inches of water all round the boat. I had not grounded on a mud-bank, but was stranded by the draining away of the water! What to do next was a question. If I could wade to the embankment, I could continue my journey on foot; but that was not to be ventured until I knew the nature of the ground, for in this part of the fen were many mire-pits, and to step into one of them meant being sucked down to a horrible death. I prodded the soil with a scull, and it went down like a spoon into porridge. I was right over a mire-pit. I tried sculling again, but that was of no use whatever. Then I attempted to thrust the boat forward, but there was nothing to thrust against. I stood up, holding the lantern above my head, peering through the mist, and saw a bush some six or seven yards ahead of me, so there was a bit of solid ground just beyond reach! If I had had a coil of rope with me, I might have thrown a loop into the bush, and so saved myself; but the painter was the only rope in the boat, and it was not more than six feet long. The only thing left for me was to wait as patiently as I could until morning, when some one might come within hail, or Luke might seek me, unless by good luck the water should rise again. 'Twas no great hardship after all: the night was not cold, but a shade chilly with the mist. As I came to this conclusion, I was startled by something which whizzed over my head and fell with a splash and a soft thud

some yards beyond the boat. Somebody must be throwing from the embankment, and at me apparently. My lantern must assist his aim, so, not wishing to extinguish it, having no means of relighting it, I wrapped a thick neckerchief I wore over the horn, and stowed it in the bow. While I did this another stone crashed into the boat with such force that I judged it was hurled from a sling. Other stones followed in swift succession, but not more than one in three or four hit the boat; but one struck me such a thump on the buttock as to set me thinking what the consequence would be of receiving another blow like it in a more vital part.

I could not devise any kind of protection at the moment, but it occurred to me that a little dodge might puzzle my enemy. I pulled up one of the thwarts with no great effort, for the little craft was old and rotten, took off my coat to hide my operations from the enemy, cut a bit of the painter, and lashed the lantern to the thwart, and set it afloat on the water, trusting to the chance that it might drift away. I placed it with the horn on the side from the embankment, hoping it might go a little way before my assailant caught sight of it. To my great relief it glided gently off, not rounding until it had gone, as nearly as I could guess, some twenty yards. It drew his volleys for a while, and then it vanished, though whether he struck it, or it toppled over by chance, I knew not. While his attention was thus diverted from me, I had time

to think what to do in case he contrived to discover my whereabouts again, which I was sanguine enough to consider unlikely. In this I was mistaken, my enemy was not to be so easily beaten. But I turned the temporary respite to the best advantage I could think of by tearing up the other thwart, so as to get room to stretch myself in the bottom of the boat, and rolling to one side, depressing the gunnel nearly to the surface of the water, thus shielding myself from hurt as long as the crazy boards might hold against his battery.

I had been none too quick. A faint red gleam began to show through the mist, and having some notion of what the enemy might be about, I slightly enlarged the aperture of a gaping seam, and looked toward the embankment. A fire had been kindled, and the man who had lighted it stood full in the glare of it. As I had supposed, the man was Vliet. He had a gun hanging at his back and a sling in his hand. Doubtless he had seen my departure from Sandtoft, pulled up the sluice-gate to let off the water, and followed me along the embankment. Chance had favoured him by stranding me on a spot from which I could not move. He had only to knock my boat to pieces, or even to make it unfloatable, and my fate was sealed. He could return to close the sluice, and in a few hours the water would cover both the boat and me. That was pretty safe, if he did no more than smash the boat. He would try to do more than that, I had no doubt. I could do

nothing. To attempt to crawl over the slime would be to seek death. I must stick to the boat as long as the planks held together, hiding myself, if possible, and making no sound. He might imagine that I had escaped, or that I was dead, if I made no sign.

As I watched his doings, he gave me a ray of hope. He lifted a bottle to his mouth, and he did not tilt it high. How fervently I hoped that he had enough to get drunk on! His next move showed he was not by any means drunk at present. He walked away from the fire, often stooping down, as I supposed, to pick up stones. He evidently meant to spare powder and shot as long as he could, and to do his work as silently as possible. When he came back to the fire, he lighted a torch and descended the embankment, looking carefully at the soil of the fen, as if he sought to get nearer to the boat, but he had too much prudence to venture. Then he ascended the bank and resumed his sling. He had found where the boat lay, for he managed to hit about once in three times. His aim was so bad that it would have been laughable under other circumstances, but I had no inclination to laugh, as plank after plank cracked and started. I turned over, and lay with my back to him, grinding my teeth with rage to be so ignominiously stoned and so utterly helpless. At length, perhaps after an hour of continuous firing, came a pause, and I turned over to look at my enemy. It was only too easy to see him through gaping seams

and holes broken in the planking. He sat between the fire and me, so that his every movement was clearly discernible. If I had had a gun I could have shot him wherever I chose. He rubbed his right shoulder with his left hand, as if it ached with his exercise. Then he drank from his bottle, tilting it higher this time. He sat so long that I began to hope he imagined he had made an end of me; but by-and-by he rose to his feet, took his gun in hand, and prepared to fire. I rolled to the very edge of the gunnel now, and the water and ooze flowed softly in on me. It was well I did, for Vliet's aim with a gun was another matter than his aim with a sling. Shot after shot struck and riddled the heap of boards which had been a boat, but as by a miracle, shot after shot missed me. Vliet plainly believed that there could be no one in the wreck except a dead man, for he began to sing. Never have I listened to music, even the best, with more pleasure than I had in hearing that thick and drunken voice yelling a tuneless song! I watched him finish his bottle, scatter the fire, and heard by the diminishing noise that he was going back to Sandtoft.

It was not until he had gone, that I knew how cold and wet I was, and then discovered that the half of the boat on which I lay had sunk into the mire. At first I fancied that I had to do with nothing more serious than the ooze, which had flowed in when I lay on the edge of the boat; but by dipping my fingers straight down into the mud,

I found that the pit was swallowing my raft and me slowly, but surely, at the rate, it might be, of a barleycorn a minute. I could not be sure of that, for I had no certainty about time. The one certainty was that the mud was gaining on me. I feared to move about, lest my weight should make worse of the wreck; but I could not lie still in the dark to be steadily sucked under, so I rolled over in a very gingerly manner, and by degrees pressed down the holed and shattered planking on to the surface of the mire, thus upheaving the side on which I had before lain. For a wonder it did not go utterly to pieces, and I lay on it some time before it began to be overflowed by the mud, when I turned gently over to the other side which had been raised by my weight. This gave way more quickly than before, but it held me up for perhaps ten minutes, and then I repeated the performance, and continued this kind of see-saw for, I should think, an hour or more, but on the seventh or eighth turning, with a great cracking, the one side parted from the other, the line of breakage being not far from the keel, as I made out by groping. For a second or two, I fell into despair, but soon perceived that my chances of escape were perhaps improved by the splitting of the boat. Kneeling on the less broken half, with my legs as far apart as I could stretch them, I tried to pull the other half upwards and forwards. It was hard work, for the mire held it fast, and my half sank at least half a foot while I tugged at the other, but at length I

had the mass in front of me, and crawled on to it. My arms felt as if they were pulled half out of their sockets, but there was no time to rest. I must try to get the piece of the wreck on which I had knelt out of the mire and before the other. This proved a tougher job still.

Before the thing was done, I was up to the middle of my thighs in the pit, and almost spent, but done it was at last, and as I pushed it forward, it encountered some solid obstacle. There was dry ground, or a tree, not more than three yards or so ahead of me. That assurance gave me the strength of madness. I dragged myself a little out of the mud, and threw myself on the piece of wreckage with such force, that it sank beneath my weight so deeply that I was swallowed up in the mire, shoulder high. But the other end of my raft remained firm, and by clutching, writhing, pulling, I got inch by inch out of the slough, and, while doing so, to my unspeakable joy I perceived a faint glimmer of dawn. That showed me a down-drooping branch of birch above my head, which at last I reached, and clung to it trembling lest it should break. It held, and by its aid I gained solid ground. I threw my arms round the trunk of the tree as though it had been a human friend, laughing and sobbing in a breath. Then I vowed Sebastian Vliet should answer to me for his dastard trick before he was many hours older. After that, I remembered to thank God for my deliverance, and fell asleep over my thanksgiving. I must

have slept an hour or more, for the sun was above the horizon when I awoke cold and shivering.

It would be wearisome to relate how I got home, for nothing happened by the way; though I have the keenest recollection of the effort it cost to walk the two miles, which were as long as twenty, my clothing being caked with mire even to my shirt, and my limbs shaking with cold and exhaustion.

But by the usual breakfast hour I had eaten and drunk, washed and changed, and was my own man again. I had need of all my strength, for my father came into the room with suppressed fury in face and voice.

"At last you have condescended to honour me," he began. "Have you come to say you will save Temple from the hammer, or that you choose beggary for yourself and disgrace for your father? Quick: let me know your mind."

"If you mean will I wed a girl I do not love——" I was answering, when my father burst out—

"Bah! Do not sicken me with play-actor rubbish. Are you going to act like a man of sense and of honour, or like an idiot?"

"I will not offer marriage to Mistress Ryther," I replied.

"Then begone out of the house," he thundered, "and let me never see your fool-face again, and if there is anything in a father's curse, may it cling to you as long as you live."

At this moment, Mr. Butharwick entered the room with a feeble step. He stretched out his

hands imploringly to my father, and said in a voice not his own—

"My honoured patron, my friend and benefactor," and something more which was indistinguishable, for his mouth began to work strangely. Then he staggered, and would have fallen but my father caught him in his arms, and laid him on the couch.

I called for help, and servants came hurrying into the room, to whom my father gave order about fetching a surgeon, and this, that, and the other, adding—

"Bid Savage, the attorney, come to me without delay." Then, turning to me, he said: "Will you go, or must I have you thrown out by the servants?"

My dear old tutor's face looked my way, and I thought I saw a beseeching in his eyes, but I could do nothing. I went out, haunted by the drawn face and the wistful eyes, and the face of my father hard as if cut in marble. It was my last sight of both of them.

Luke met me in the hall, and I bade him follow me to my room. He had a letter for me, the first I had received from my love, full of courage and cheer, which just then I sadly needed. Luke told me the doctor was transported with rage on hearing his daughter avow her fixed determination to abide by her promise to me, so that even Martha was terrified by his furious wrath. And my true-hearted love could write to sustain my flagging spirits when she was in such trouble herself!

Everybody had been at a loss to understand Vliet, who had tried to soothe the doctor, affecting to think Mistress Goel would be in a more compliant temper by-and-by. I understood him well enough. The scoundrel was confident he had put me out of the way: he should soon know better. It eased my heart a little to write him a few lines, in which I challenged him to meet me in open fight, and declared I would hunt him down like a verminous beast if he was too cowardly to meet me fairly. This I gave to Luke to be delivered into Vliet's hand without loss of time.

After I had told Luke of my last night's adventure, to which he listened with wide eyes and some muttered curses, he cried out—

"From this time forrard, Measter Frank, I'se stick to you like your shadder."

"That is just what you will not do, my good fellow, for I am an outcast from my father's house; and where I may go, or what I shall do is all in the dark to me, except that I kill Vliet, if he does not kill me, to-day or to-morrow."

"Wherever you go, I go too," answered my man.

"That is quite impossible, Luke," said I. "We must part for the good reason that I have not five pounds in the world, and that won't keep me, to say nothing of a serving man, for many days. Besides," I added, "you can be much more useful to me by staying at Temple. I may want a friend in the house, and I want above all things, some trusty

friend to watch over the safety of Mistress Goel, when I may be far away. You can come and go between this and Sandtoft, and I shall be sure that whatever two true souls can do for her will be done."

We argued and wrangled for a good while, Luke urging everything he could think of to induce me to take him with me, but I would not give way. He took my instructions sorrowfully, not to say sulkily, as to what was to be done with my belongings, the main of which I desired him to carry to the vicarage at Crowle, with a message to my aunt. Just then I could not face the dear lady, or bear her exclamations and expostulations, nor did I incline to see my friend Portington. I had resolved to spend the time between now and my duel with Vliet at Belshaw, in the company of my new friend, because there could be no heartrending talk with him, and also because I hoped to learn from him how to join Captain John Smith, which appeared to me the likeliest means of earning my living, with some chance of cutting my way to fortune. For the few days which I expected to pass in the neighbourhood, I meant to ride Trueboy, and afterwards to sell him to replenish my purse. These things being arranged, I appointed a place where Luke was to meet me the next evening, and went to the stables. I hoped to get away quietly, but it was not to be. Almost every servant in and about the house, down to the kitchen wench and the youngest stable-boy, had assembled

to say good-bye to me, the women crying, and the men murmuring hoarsely what they meant for encouragement. They would have unmanned me, but for Trueboy. He, having had far too little exercise lately, was as frisky as an unbroken colt, rearing, and lashing out his heels in sheer delight, so the little crowd scattered right and left, and I mounted and rode off at full gallop across the park, the shortest cut to Belshaw.

Chapter XIV

"I SUPPOSE Vliet will be blotted out of existence, if he be fool enough to meet you, which I doubt. But, my friend, you are of a charming simplicity. We are not an extremely law-abiding people in the Isle, but there is a constable of the wapentake; there are justices of the peace. Would it have been very troublesome to send the Dutchman to Lincoln Castle to await his trial for attempted murder? He would have been out of the way for a time, at any rate, and there is just a chance he might have been hanged. You prefer to give him the opportunity to shoot you, or to devise some other means of killing you more convenient to himself. Or, if you should kill him, the law may be set in motion against you, probably by the gentleman who objects to you as a son-in-law. If you will be advised by me, you will retract your cartel of defiance, and take steps to commit Mynherr Vliet to gaol."

So spoke my friend Drury, when I told him how matters stood with me. One half of my mind held him wise, but that did not in the least quench my desire to settle my quarrel with Vliet man to man. I have often done things, knowing all the while I was a fool for doing them; my difficulty not being lack of wisdom (for my friends have

always been ready to supply me with the best) so much as want of liking for it.

While I waited at Belshaw for the answer to my challenge, my friend gave me many particulars of the history of Captain John Smith, whom he thought one of the greatest men in the world, although the captain was his cousin.

"He is now in London," said John, "and in hope to lead another expedition. He will snap you up at a word. A tall fellow who has more lives than a cat, and relishes fighting better than his victuals, will suit him to admiration."

"There, indeed, you mistake me," I protested. "I am no lover of brawls, and would go far to avoid one."

"But not so far as to the house of a justice of the peace—eh?" answered John, with his low, pleasant laugh. "I have been wondering why you hate Lord Sheffield so cordially."

"Oh! that is a very old story. His younger brother—younger by nine or ten years—and I were playmates. He was a tender little chap, and I was a big, hulking boy; but I was his squire, ready almost to be his dog, partly because he was as delicate as a girl, and partly because he was of so fine a spirit. Child as he was, he could make me laugh or cry by the music he drew out of his fiddle. What was the driest taskwork to me was play to him, and while I slowly spelled out a story of Greece or Rome, he was somehow rapt away, and seeing it all enacted before his eyes. And he told

tales of his own making such as I never heard or read. But I cannot describe him. His elder brother used to torment him with the devil's own cunning. Edmund was feeble in body and timid, but he scorned to be a coward. His chief pride he took in that his father had received the Garter for his courageous exploits against the Spanish Armada, and he would not own to fear, even when he was ready to die of it. Sheffield practised on the child's pride and terror, endlessly. An old mastiff, chained in the courtyard, was so savage (with some kind of pain, poor beast, I doubt not) that the kennel-man feared to deal with it. One day Sheffield dared his little brother to go up to the dog, swearing him a coward if he did not. Edmund went within the reach of the mastiff, and fell down in a faint. The dog was nobler than the brother, and did not touch the child. At another time, Sheffield tied a rope round Edmund's body and lowered him far down the deepest well, threatening to let go the rope, and paying it so fast as to terrify the boy into thinking he had done so."

"But why, in Heaven's name, didn't the little one appeal to his father?"

"He would have died sooner. He was drawn up from the well more dead than alive, and was ill for days after, but he never breathed a word about the torture he had been put to, except to me."

"But why didn't you acquaint his lordship with what went on? You couldn't be afraid of the big brother."

"I was afraid of my hero's contempt. He would have thought me dastardly, traitorous, I know not what, if I had told tales of the cruelty he was too proud to complain of himself. But there came an end to the business, and I made it. Looking for Edmund one day, I went into an outhouse, where Sheffield had the little fellow across his knee, held fast as in a vice, and the demon was pinching his tender body with slow, screwing pinches. Edmund was writhing and moaning. I didn't stop to think, but struck the tormentor's cheek as hard as I could with my fist, and the next instant we were going at each other with all our might. I was only a lad of fourteen and he a man of twenty-four, but I was tall and strong for my age. He knocked me down pretty often, but I was up like a cat and flew at him again, until, either in fear lest he should kill me, or in fear for himself, he opened the door and ran. Shortly afterward, as Edmund led me across the courtyard—for both my eyes were puffed up so that I could not see—it chanced that the earl met us, and would have an account of what I had been doing. Nothing loth, I answered his questions, and he heard enough to make him careful Edmund suffered no more at the hands of his brother. The dear little fellow died a year later. I could tell you more, but do you wonder I hate my Lord Sheffield?"

"No," answered John. "I don't wonder at that. I am inclined to wonder that he is still alive."

"I have had very little to do with him since

Edmund's death. The earl, who used to have a kindness for me, seemed to shun the sight of me from that time forward."

In the afternoon Luke appeared, grinning as he entered the room.

"What tickles you so much?" I asked.

"That Dutchman," answered Luke, laughing outright. "Was as scart as if 'a'd seen a bogle, when 'a oppened t' letter, and said sommat in 's own lingo, swearing like. Asked me when you gev it me. So I says, 'This morning, when 'a came down to breakfass.' Then 'a stared at me with his mouth as wide as a church door, and I stared at him as simple as a sheep."

We laughed, and I opened Vliet's letter. He had written in Dutch for some unimaginable reason, perhaps because he was puzzled and shaken out of his wits.

Drury reached out his hand. "I have some acquaintance with the tongue," he said.

Vliet accepted my challenge, and would meet me the next evening at six o'clock at a spot about three-quarters of a mile from my present lodging, where we might be free from interruption. He would come alone. He chose the sword as his weapon, and sent me its length.

From time to time between the coming of Vliet's letter and the hour appointed, Drury expressed apprehension of some treachery on the part of the Dutchman, begging me not to go alone, and to have some other weapon besides my sword, but I

smiled at his fears. As I said again and again, Vliet could not bring accomplices with him without my seeing them on the fen, and I meant to keep a good look-out. I would not take Luke with me, for I had other occasion for his service, namely, to go with a letter to Anna, in which I asked her to meet me on the following day. John shook his head over what he deemed reckless folly, and I laughed the more, though I felt sorry his long confinement to his couch had made him so timorous.

About five o'clock on Sunday evening, I ascended the rising ground behind the tavern, and watched for Vliet's coming, which was not long delayed. He came alone in a punt, and as far as I could see without other arms than his sword. I had pistols in my belt. I met him at the little wharf, and after salutations, we walked in silence to the ground, he making no remark on my fire-arms.

The country had never seemed more lovely to my thinking than it did on this still August evening. Ridges and islets, purple with ling, stood out of the green and golden brown of the fen; water-lilies, yellow and white, spotted the surface of the water, and patches of the blue trumpets of the gentian brightened the edges of the marsh. Young broods of duck and moorhen were playing and splashing near the shelter of the reed-beds, which swayed gently under the evening breeze, and the sound of Belton church-bells came, now

loudly, now softly, with the rising and falling of the light wind. 'Twas not a suitable time or place for killing a man, methought, as I looked at the landscape, but a glance at Vliet changed my feeling. As for being killed myself, that never came into my mind. The road wound to the right, and again to the right, out of view of Belshaw, to a sort of natural terrace, which would fit our business. Above us on one side the ground sloped gradually upward to an oak plantation, thirty yards away; below the terrace there lay a sharp incline which ended at the margin of the fen.

"Dis vill do—dis vill do!" shouted Vliet at the top of his voice; and as I began a remonstrance at the noise he made, three horsemen rode swiftly out of cover of the plantation, one straight toward us, and the other two in a more curving course, as if to cut off my retreat.

"Yield, or we fire," said one of them.

I answered by drawing pistol out of belt, and shooting at the villain who had laid this ambush for me, but I missed him. Then I flew up the bank to an old tree, the nearest of the plantation. If I could get my back against it, there was a bare chance I might keep them all at bay for a short time, and the sound of firing might bring me help from Belshaw. I gained the tree, my pursuers close on my heels, but not firing. As I turned to face them, my foot slipped on one of the roots, and I fell backward against the tree with some force. With a great crunch, the bark gave way, and back

I went into the hollow, jammed tight from rump to knees. Before I could work myself free, the men were on me. They disarmed, bound, and gagged me in no time, and then fell into great laughter at the ease of the capture. All three wore short cloaks with high collars, and had pulled their hats down over their brows, but I saw that one was Sheffield's big negro. Vliet lay down and roared with glee, and ended by rolling over near to me and spitting in my face. One of the others gave him a kick in the ribs, calling him "dunghill cock" in a voice I did not know. Vliet jumped to his feet, and drew his sword, but a cudgel fell like lightning on his wrist, disabling him for the present.

"No more waste of time," said he who had struck the blow. "You, Mynherr, will go north as far as Belton, and home by your new embankment. If you are questioned, you will say that you met Mr. Vavasour here, intending to fight him, but before you could draw sword, he rushed up the hill, and disappeared in the plantation."

"Backside first," one of the others threw in, laughing.

The first speaker continued, "He disappeared, and you could find no trace of him. It is a short story, and can be remembered, even when one is muddled with strong liquor. If you don't stick to it, you will be dead meat soon. Now, stir your stumps."

When Vliet had gone out of hearing, two of the

men carried me through the plantation, on the other side of which ran the high-road. Here waited a fourth man in charge of a horse and cart. They bundled me into the cart, throwing sacks over me. I heard the man who had done all the talking say, "Two within hail in front, and one behind. Remember, you have nothing to do with me unless I whistle twice." So the director was my charioteer. By-and-by the jogging of the cart shook a piece of sacking from my face, and I could see the driver, a common labourer by his dress, with a fringe of ragged beard all round his face. He sat slouching forward, staring vacantly before him, as stupid as any lout in the Isle. As we rumbled through Epworth some one accosted him.

"Cartin' o' Sunday! What hasta getten theer?"

"Nobbut a half deead mon from Keadby for Doctor Hoggatt," was the reply. "Ah'd keeap ma distance, if ah wor theea, fur 'a smells loike t' plague tu meea."

The hint sufficed to make the inquirer sheer off quickly.

When we had passed through Epworth, we rattled on faster, and in half an hour arrived at the gates opening into the grounds of Melwood Priory, a house which had had many tenants since the Carthusians were driven out of it, and all unlucky. It had stood unoccupied now for ten or a dozen years, falling into decay, and was believed to be haunted by the ghost of Matthew Meekness, the last lord prior. Few persons cared to enter its

precincts alone, even by day, and fewer still would dare to enter them by night. My conductors had chosen a very safe place of concealment for whatever crime they had in view. We entered the avenue, or rather what had been one, for all the trees had been cut down long ago, and the cart bumped and joggled along the unkempt road until it came to a stand at the main entrance. My captors pulled me out of the cart, carried me in, and down some steps into a large, vaulted chamber, which, as I saw by the light of a fire of logs blazing on the hearth, showed such signs of occupation as a table, a chair, several stools, a rough couch, pots and pans on a shelf, and other odds and ends. Here they laid me down on the floor and left me. I heard coming and going, slamming of doors, shouts of laughter, and supposed my captors were telling their story to comrades, but I could not think. My head throbbed fearfully, and my limbs were cramped and cut by the ropes with which I was bound. In a while, the driver of the cart came in, attended by the Moor, carrying a lamp, which he placed on the table. The driver knelt down beside me. His fringe of beard had gone, and I knew him. It was Boswell. He took the gag out of my mouth, and said—

"Perhaps I needn't tell you where you are, Mr. Vavasour—on the lowest floor of Melwood Priory. There is only one door by which you could get out, and it is bolted and barred and well guarded. There are six men at my call, every one well

armed. Resistance is hopeless, and can only end in your being baldy mauled. I am going to cut your cords, and I hope for your own sake you won't try to play any pranks."

I made no answer, but he released me, and handed the one chair to me. My limbs were so benumbed that I had something to do to get up and seat myself.

"Now," Boswell said, "hand me that bundle, Musty." The negro produced it from a corner. "I want your clothes, which you must take off, even to your shirt, and put on these. Leave your pockets as they are."

I obeyed, for I saw the odds were too great for me to dispute with the fellow, but contrived to hide and keep my love-token, which I wore round my neck. The clothing given to me in place of my own was clean and decent, but of the commonest homespun.

"Will you give me your word to make no attempt at escape?" asked Boswell. "If so, I will spare you these things"—picking up manacles and fetters from underneath the couch.

"I will give no promise of any kind," I answered.

"As I expected," he rejoined; and proceeded to fasten the bonds on my wrists and ankles.

Both handcuffs and fetters were connected by a short, strong chain. So bound, I was helpless against the weakest man who had the use of his limbs, and Boswell smiled a grim smile as he marked how clumsy I was in moving.

A week of my imprisonment passed without event. Once a day, generally in the early morning, Boswell or the Moor appeared, placing food and water and fuel within my reach. When they had gone, I had the freedom of the corridor and the rooms or cells opening into it, and I shuffled about with a brand from the fire in my hand—the lamp had been carried off—rather despairingly seeking to discover some outlet, or what might be made into one; but there was not even a crack through which daylight might be perceived, and the floor everywhere was of solid stone. The door at the end of the corridor was thick and heavy, and strengthened with iron bands. I beat on it by the hour together, shouting and yelling as loud as I could, on the chance that some one might come within earshot. I searched every nook and corner for a file, or what might serve the purpose of a file, but in vain. I attempted to break my bonds by jerking and straining, but the only result was hurt to myself. When too much spent for such efforts, and weary of prowling and prying, I endeavoured to guess what were the intentions of my gaolers, and what my friends might be doing on my behalf, but got small light or comfort by this means. I thought it likely my father would give little heed to what Luke might say to him; he might even imagine I was hiding somewhere. If my man went to Dick Portington, there might be quest made for me, but it would naturally go after Vliet, and if he stuck to the tale which Bos-

well had put into his mouth, nothing would ensue of advantage to me. I grew frantic when I pictured to myself Anna's perplexity and distress; but in one short week I sank into a kind of lethargy, which was broken now and then by fits of rage—helpless, foolish rage. Used as I was to freedom, light, air, exercise, good food, the confinement in the dark told on my health and spirits greatly. If my gaoler had not given me fire, I think I should have lost my wits. It was, indeed, a friend to me.

On the eighth day, Boswell paid me a visit in the evening, and brought me much better fare than had been supplied during the week. He was attended by several men, who did not enter my dungeon, but made merry in the chamber adjoining mine. He spread the table with decent viands, and produced a bottle of wine, the black man coming and going all the time on one errand or another, both being weaponed. When supper was laid, Boswell removed my manacles and fetters, and invited me to eat and drink; and I drew up to table, thinking, as I took knife into my hand, now free, that the best use to which I could put it would be to cut the fellow's throat; but, as I should be all the better of meat and wine, I decided to wait until after supper. He smiled, as if he read my thoughts, and called out, "Hal, Pete, Robin, have you your tools handy?" But he did not quite understand my notion, which was that it might be a good thing to make an end of him,

whatever might happen to me afterwards. When I had finished my meal, Boswell said—

"I have to make you an offer, which will not be made again, if you refuse it. If you will put yourself into my hands, I will have you conveyed out of this country, and set free with money enough in your purse to equip yourself like a gentleman."

"Is it part of your conditions that I see nobody—speak to nobody—and disappear without the knowledge of my friends?" I asked.

"Assuredly."

"Then I decline your offer."

"Consider well," he replied. "You will disappear, whether you accept or refuse. You have disappeared already. If you agree to my proposal, you will find yourself free, with a well-filled purse. You will be some thousands of miles away from England; but there will be nothing to hinder your return, if you desire to return."

"And what will happen to me if I refuse?"

"You will find yourself far away from home and friends, penniless, helpless, a hopeless slave."

"Why should you be at so much trouble in disposing of me? Why not kill me here?"

"Well inquired," said Boswell. "If my advice had been taken, you would have been buried under these stones."

"I am indebted to you for your kindness," I remarked.

"You may come to think so," answered Boswell.

"My patron wants a fuller vengeance than your death would be."

"Vengeance!" I exclaimed.

"He has much to say (in his cups, I grant) of how you stole the affection of a brother, and bred quarrel between him and his father, and alienated friends from him. If the half be true, it is no wonder he should hate you."

I sat speechless with astonishment awhile, for I was too young to know what lies men can tell, deluding even themselves into a sort of belief in their truth.

"What I say," continued Boswell, as if to himself, "is that revenge is costly, and death pays all."

"But, how would my removal to a distant country satisfy Sheffield, if he burns for vengeance?" I asked.

"I did not say that it would. The offer is mine," he answered.

"Oh, you would play false with your patron, pretending you had carried me off to the hopeless slavery of which you speak, but setting me at liberty, when we were far enough away? Is that your scheme? And what do you stand to gain thereby?"

"Your bond for five hundred pounds."

"Which, as you doubtless know, would be worth precisely nothing."

"If I am willing to take the risk, that is my concern. Look you, Mr. Vavasour, I will be open

with you. I have no spite against you, nor any great liking for this business, being in it solely for the money to be made by it—and money I must have. If you agree to my terms, Lord Sheffield is rid of you for six or nine months, or, it may be, a year. I keep faith with him so far that he has value for his money. But you return safe and sound, which is value for yours. Nay, hear me out. If you refuse my offer, Frank Vavasour will be dead and buried and mourned awhile by his friends; and even if you should contrive to return to England, nobody—not even your nearest relative—will believe that you are he."

"Bah! Would you persuade me you are Satan himself, to work such wonders? And, if you are, I make no compact with the devil."

I spoke more boldly than my inward feeling warranted, for I began to fear the man. He took no offence, as it seemed, but answered—

"Sleep on it. Night is a good counsellor."

A moment later, he asked if I desired more wine, and took up the bottle.

"You have not emptied this yet, I see."

He placed bottle and cup near me, made fast the door opening on the corridor, and joined his comrades in the next chamber, whom his presence appeared to check, for their talk and laughter became subdued. I drank the remainder of my wine, and began to pace the length of the room, endeavouring to fathom Boswell's designs; but could make nothing of his strange threats, inclining

to think his mysterious language was mere gipsy rodomontade. In a short time I grew sleepy—extremely so—and threw myself on the couch, the absence of my bonds enabling me to stretch at my ease, and soon fell asleep.

Chapter XV

IN my sleep I dreamed of what happened when I was seized and carried off. Again I was running up the slope, again I backed against the tree, again I fell through the yielding bark, again my captors bound me and thrust me into the cart.

And I awoke to find myself more tightly bound than before. My arms were held to my sides by a sack, and my legs were fastened to a pole. My head was firmly clamped, I knew not how. I could move my lips and my eyes; otherwise I was like a man of wood. A lamp stood on a projection of the wall, so that its light shone full on my face, and Boswell was stooping over me with a knife in his hand. My cheek was wet, and a smarting there told me the moisture was blood. What could the man be cutting my face for, I wondered, being dazed and not yet out of my dream. Before I had quite come to myself, he had made two slits in my nose, and pressed it to one side. At this I yelled, not so much for pain as from a kind of fright, and with that I regained my senses pretty well.

"What's your devilish game now?" I asked with difficulty, for blood was running into my mouth.

Boswell gave me no answer, but went on with his operation. He laid down his knife, released my head, pulled out of his pocket a narrow strip of cloth, and bound it tightly over my nose, crushing it cruelly. I could not speak now, being near suffocation by the stoppage of my nose with the bandage and of my mouth with blood. When he had taken a good, long look at his surgery, Boswell filled and lighted his pipe, and sat down to full enjoyment of his tobacco. While he sat puffing smoke through his nostrils, I recovered my wits a little, perceiving that I had been overcome by some drug, mixed with the wine I had taken, but what was the intent of the villain in gashing my face I could not surmise. My first thought was that the design might be to make me hideous in Anna's sight.

As I lay, dizzily pondering, Boswell finished his pipe and laid it down to resume his work. He passed a cord several times round my body just above and below my elbows, knotting it securely. Then he slit the sack, and tore open my shirt, laying bare my breast, and taking up a needle and a small pot from the table, he began pricking my chest, dipping the point of the needle often into the pot. The pricking was worse to bear than the slashing with the knife, but I made no outcry, knowing the uselessness of it. So I lay silently shivering under the dab, dab of the needle for what seemed to me a fearfully long time, while he worked some kind of pattern on my breast. At

length it came to an end, and when Boswell had examined his handiwork, adding a touch here and there, he laid down his implements, refilled his pipe, refreshed himself from a bottle, and sat down with the air of one well pleased with his achievement.

I thought it plain that this business with knife and needle was intended to give me a deceiving resemblance to some other man, in all likelihood a boatman or sailor, for such fellows had a custom of wearing figures and letters imprinted on breast or arm. The man into whose likeness I was to be changed had, I supposed, a broken nose and a scar on his cheek. But I could not see how this marking and mutilation would avail much, so long as I had the use of my tongue. Still, Boswell must have considered this. He must have thought how easy it would be for me to declare who I was, and to give proof of my identity. Must he not be prepared for such a certain event? There came to my mind stories I had heard of the disappearance of persons who stood between others and a great inheritance, and of the abduction of persons who might be inconvenient witnesses against men of rank and power. Some of these stories ran on to the discovery of such persons in after years, rendered blind or mute, or reduced to idiocy, by the art and craft of gipsies. I had smiled at these fireside tales of the peasantry, but as I lay helplessly bound on this ninth day of my imprisonment within a few miles of home, smarting and

aching under wounds inflicted by gipsy tools, I became more credulous. Boswell might deprive me of sight or speech or strength by a knife-thrust, or even the prick of a needle. How I had laughed at the warnings of Bess! But the event had more than justified them. Well, come what might, there was only one course for me, to play the man and trust in God, as I vowed to do to the end.

There is no need to linger over the details of the next few days. Boswell attended closely on me for a week, treating my wounds with salve, and compelling me to drink a quantity of some abominable decoction. He eased my bonds from time to time, but took good heed to prevent my having freedom to use my arms, while I watched closely for any opportunity.

On the sixteenth day of my captivity, Sheffield's negro appeared on the scene, evidently bringing disquieting news for my jailer. He carried a hamper into the adjoining chamber, and there the two conversed in a lingo which I did not understand, but from the tone of their voices I judged that they were hurried, and in perturbation of mind. Now one and now the other went out, and once I heard a great crash overhead. Finally, the negro brought in an iron ball of fifty or sixty pounds' weight, attached by bar and chain to a ring, which Boswell locked on my right ankle, otherwise releasing me entirely. The pair kept their eyes on me, and their weapons handy, when this had been done, but I was not so foolhardy as

to attack them. In truth, a great hope had come to me that they meant to leave me alone awhile, and I waited to see whether they would deprive me of the means of deliverance. After a good deal of gibberish had passed between them, and the Moor had done various errands at Boswell's command, both went out together, locking and barring the door in the corridor, and then the outer door behind them.

I picked up the ball, which I could carry in the crook of my arm, lighted a lamp which had been left on the table, and made a tour of inspection, rejoicing to be able to move about, my limbs being stiff and feeble by long constraint. As I had imagined, the negro had brought a store of food. I found bread, salt-beef, tongue, a couple of pasties, several bottles of burgundy, a jar of aqua vitæ, but no water. But I had no great concern about meat or drink. It was more to my purpose that there were eight moderate-sized faggots of sticks, a pile of turves, and a dozen largish logs. These would suffice. I shouted for joy to find a small hatchet, but was disappointed in searching for oil: the jar was empty. My survey taken, I made up the fire, and put my iron ball at the back of it, so that the links of the chain connecting ball and bar might get the full benefit of the heat, and as soon as one grew red, I prised it open with the head of the hatchet. Fire had freed me from a weight, and provided me with a missile, which, if well thrown, would disable an enemy. I had no means of rid-

ding myself of the bar, much though it would be in my way in my next effort, which was to explore the chimney. I removed the fire from the hearth, and had it well blazing in the middle of the floor, before attempting the chimney, for on fire I must now chiefly depend for my liberation.

My climbing brought down such a quantity of soot as almost smothered and choked me, and I found the flue so narrow a little way up, as to forbid all hope of escape in that direction to a man of my width and stature. So I restored the fire to the hearth, and began my second enterprise. I heaped turves and sticks against the door of the corridor on the side on which it was hinged, and set fire to the pile. The flames soon licked the door, but they did no more than blacken it, for it was hard and solid, and moreover, as I have said, protected by bands of iron. It was like to be a slower business than I had expected, and time being precious, I cast about for means to hasten the process. There was a small poker on the hearth in my dungeon, which I made red-hot, and tried to bore holes with it in the upper part of the door, but the poker was thin, and the door was stout and thick. The bar, which dragged at my ankle, would have been more serviceable, but I could not manage to break any of the links which held it to the shackle. In the intervals of reheating my little poker, I chopped at the door with the hatchet, and when my hands grew very sore, varied my employment by hurling the ball

against the place where I had chopped and bored.

How long I spent over the work I cannot reckon, but I had used more than half of my stock of fuel when the fire really took hold. When I saw the door begin to burn I turned away, lest in my impatience I should be tempted to meddle, and so hinder the business. I forced myself to eat a few mouthfuls of food and to drink a little wine before I returned. What was my joy to see that the lower hinge-iron had slightly parted from the woodwork! I threw myself against the door with all my strength. It yielded a little, and, at the fourth or fifth rush, it gave completely, and I had cleared the first barrier.

I made haste to heap all the remaining fuel against the outer door, emptying over the pile the contents of the jar of aqua vitæ. The roaring blaze bit the wood almost at once, clean contrary to my expectation; but I suppose it was weather-worn and perhaps worm-eaten. At all events, it was opened in less than half the time required for the other. For a few moments my eyes were blinded by the sudden light, but they quickly recovered, and I stood outside my prison, drinking in the pure, sweet air, and looking at green earth and blue sky with such delight as can be understood only by those who have lacked the sight of them as long as I had done—and regained it on a cloudless September morning. I had never known how beautiful are all the things which God has

made. Even the wilderness of arched and twisted brambles that grew about the place was charming to my sight, and I admired with a strange tenderness the tomtits which were flocking and fluttering about the bushes in search of the ripest fruit. From that day forward I have never looked at a caged bird without the desire to set it free. For a while I stood looking about me in a kind of ecstasy, but soon remembered I must be moving, if I would keep my new-found liberty. I judged it safest, on the whole, to keep to the main road, passing through Epworth, where I might be relieved of my fetter, and gather information. I met few people, a little gang of labourers, a boy on horseback, a pedlar carrying his pack, but no one greeted me, and all stood still to look when they had gone some distance past me. When I came to the Bull, I walked into the smithy—Johnson, who kept the inn, being a blacksmith—and asked him to remove the bar and chain. He and his man retained their hammers, and simply stared.

"Come, don't stand staring, my man, but off with this thing, quick," I said impatiently.

"And who are you?" asked he. "My Lord Dirt, from Dunghill Hall?"

"'Tis a poor lunatic 'scaped from Bedlam," growled the other.

Now I remembered my wry nose and scarred face, which I had for the time forgotten; and I remembered also that a head and face which had not been touched with water for more than a fort-

night, and had been lately poked up a chimney, and grilled over burning faggots, would certainly have no prepossessing appearance; nor would my coarse clothing, rent and smirched and stained with blood and other liquids, give me the air of a gentleman, whose commands should have instant attention. Doubtless the remembrance of these things caused me a momentary hesitation, but I answered—

"I am Frank Vavasour."

"Be'st a thundering liar!" gasped Johnson.

"'Tis a poor lunatic," said his man. "Else he wouldn't give hisself the name of a dead man."

"Dead! What do you mean, fellow?" I asked.

"I mean what I say," answered he. "Everybody knows Measter Frank Vavasour is dead, AND buried."

My head began to whirl, and I leaned against the wall to steady myself. The smith and his man whispered together.

"Do you know particulars of this pretended death?" at length I asked.

"Particulars? I should think I do," answered Johnson, nodding to his man, who went out. "The young gentleman's body was found in the pool in Belgrave Park a week ago last Sunday, shockingly disfigured, for the eels had been at his face, but he was swore to at the inquest by his manservant and his own father. His friends had been looking for him high and low, for more than a week, when they dragged the pool."

The innkeeper paused at this.

"Go on," I said hoarsely. So Boswell's craft had dressed some other man in my clothes and mangled his face.

"At the inquest, Luke Barnby, who had been the young squire's bodyservant, told how one of the Dutchmen had tried to take his master's life, and how Master Frank went out to fight the Dutchman on Sunday, the very Sunday before the one he was found, and had never been seen or heard of since. So order was given to arrest the Dutchman, and they took him."

Again the narrator paused.

"Well, what next?" I asked.

"They took him," repeated Johnson, "but they didn't keep him long. Some of the Belton and Beltoft people went by night meaning to tear the murderer limb from limb, and even some of the gipsies, that's been thereabout so long, joined 'em. They broke into the outhouse at Squire Stovin's, where he was locked up, but somehow he got away."

What more easy trick could have been played? The gipsies had befooled the rest in the darkness, and smuggled Vliet out of danger.

Fierce rage against my persecutors restored to me the wits which had been scattered in my first consternation.

"All this you have told me is a pack of lies. I don't mean that you have lied," I added, noting the heat in the man's face, "but it is a diabolical

plot. Another man has been buried under my name—a man who was dressed in my clothing, and his features obliterated cunningly. I am Frank Vavasour, and have been kept prisoner in the vaults of Melwood Priory while this devilry was doing. Remove this thing from my leg. Let me have a room, and soap and water. Tell your people to get me pen, ink, and paper. Have a lad in readiness to ride to Temple Belwood, and another to go to Tudworth Hall."

"And who's to pay, my lad? The mistress will charge high for letting a room to the like o' you. I don't send horse and man up and down the country till I see the colour of your money. Pay to-day and trust to-morrow is my motto."

"There will be no difficulty about that. My friends will——"

"No, it won't do, my man," said mine host. "Look ye, there's a pump in the yard. You can wash there, and welcome, and then do your own errands on Shanks his pony."

Seeing I should but waste time by tarrying, I got the fellow to release me from the leg-iron, and going to the pump, I made such shift as I could to cleanse my face and hands, and put my clothing into somewhat more decent array. When I saw the image of myself in the water, I no longer wondered that my tale should appear incredible, for I could scarce believe my own eyes. The flattened and twisted nose, and the scar across my cheek, had given me a look simply villainous.

The sooner the better I found myself among those who knew me, thought I, and I hurried forward with a brief good day to mine host, who stood at the smithy door staring and scratching his head, as if in some perplexity.

I made straight for Temple Belwood, where I might find Luke; nor was I quite without hope that my father might be inclined to reconciliation with a son who had come back from the dead. As I passed Belton church I caught sight of a woman seated on a flat tombstone, her back toward me, whose figure and attitude reminded me of Bess Boswell, and I entered the yard to get a nearer view. At the sound of my footfall she turned, and I saw it was the gipsy girl, her face tear-stained and woebegone.

"Ulceby!" she cried. "You here! Do you know there are soldiers about?"

"That is not my name," I answered. "Don't you know me, Bess?"

She rose from the stone, stepped closely up to me, and looked wonderingly into my face, with one hand fluttering about her breast. Then she sank back upon the tombstone, still keeping her eyes fixed on me, and said—

"Oh yes; I know your voice; I know your eyes. But where have you been? And who lies there?" —pointing to a new-made grave. "Your servant swore it was you. Your father swore so. Speak again. Let me touch you."

She rose, trembling all over, and reached out

her hand. I took hold of it, and drew her down to the stone, seating myself beside her.

"Who has done that hellish work on your face? No; don't tell me, not yet."

She hid her face in her hands, shuddering.

"That has been done to give me the semblance of the man you named just now. And this too," I said, baring my chest, showing a crown and anchor, and the letters J. U.

"Who is Ulceby?" I asked.

"A soldier, who escaped from Lincoln, after striking one of the officers, and being condemned to be sent to the plantations. He came to us for hiding. He had the ague badly, and was taken to safer and better quarters, so I was told. That was just before I was sent to Horncastle fair, and on to Corby, and Spalding, and Stamford, because my father must stay to attend to Ulceby. And he seemed to be so much concerned about the deserter, that I thought no evil could be brewing against you just then, and so I was far away when mischief was doing. But I don't understand. Where were you?"

I told how I was captured, imprisoned, mutilated, and how I had escaped.

"This Ulceby must have died on your father's hands," continued I, "and he conceived the design of taking me, putting my clothes on the dead man, corroding his face, and sinking the body in Belgrave pond."

By the girl's face, when I said that Ulceby must

have died on her father's hands, I saw she thought of a darker probability. When I had ended my narrative, she remained silent awhile. When she spoke, it was to say that the mystery of my disfigurement was beyond her; why Boswell should have spared my life, when it was so easy to take it, she could not understand.

"He must have been confident of handing you over to the soldiers himself. Perhaps he meant to put a finishing touch to his work. I have heard him say horrible things, boasting of what can be done by a pin-prick."

"Thank God, I am safe from him. I shall be at Temple shortly."

"Ah! but, of course, you don't know that Temple is shut up. Your father left almost as soon as the funeral was over. Some of his neighbours had called upon him to keep his promise of helping to drive out the foreigners as the law was powerless, and he quarrelled with them. He went away, vowing never to return, so they say."

So vanished for the present my hope of reconciliation with him.

"My old tutor?"

"Died a fortnight ago."

"And Luke Barnby?"

"I have heard nothing of him. I know little of what has been doing in the Isle, for I came back only yesterday morning. I did not hear of your death till then."

She paused with some choking in the throat, but in a moment resumed—

"You must lose no time in making yourself known to your friends. If the soldiers find you before that is done, they will drag you off to Hull."

"Where are these soldiers?" I asked.

"Some in Epworth, and some in Crowle," she replied.

Now I understood the by-play at the Bull. The blacksmith's man had gone to seek the officer, and the smith had not ventured to attempt to hold me until the soldiers came. Perhaps he had not felt entirely comfortable at the thought of giving up a poor wretch to life-long misery. I told Bess of the colloquy.

"Oh, you must go," she cried. "They may be on your track already."

"I will push on to my aunt's—to the Crowle vicarage," I answered.

"And I will go toward Epworth, and send the soldiers on a wild-goose chase, if I meet them," said Bess.

"But these men of war cannot all be looking for Ulceby, surely?"

"No, no; the search-party has returned to Lincoln, but these men are billeted hereabout to keep the Islonians in check, because of the attacks which have been made on Sandtoft; but there is a reward offered for the capture of Ulceby, and poor Daft Jack may be taken, if he is found. I meant to try to find and warn him, but now I

must go the other way. But you must go at once."

"Stay yet half a minute," I said. "Do you know where Boswell is, and what he is about?"

"To-morrow night at Daft Jack's cottage, I will tell you all I know. You must not lose more time. And take my purse, for you must be penniless."

"In an hour I shall be at the vicarage," said I, declining.

"Then you can give it back to me to-morrow night."

She thrust it into my hand, and we went our different ways.

Chapter XVI

I KEPT to the road, often glancing backward for any sign of pursuit, but reached Crowle without adventure, and made straight for the vicarage. The front door stood open, and I strode in, right glad to be in security, shouting, "Aunt, where are you?" forgetting, for the moment, the shock I was like to give her. A maid whom I did not know came from the kitchen, but stopped short at sight of me, and screamed. That brought me to recollection.

"Don't be alarmed, my wench," said I, "but go quick to Mistress Graves, and tell her there is one here who has news for her."

But the maid continued to scream "Master! Thieves! Murder!" And her cries brought a strange clergyman into the hall, who appeared not to like the look of me.

"What is this? Who are you? What is your business?" he asked, all in a breath.

"I would see Mistress Graves," I answered.

"Mistress Graves is with her husband in Lincoln, as every one in the parish knows," said the parson, eyeing me more mistrustfully.

"In Lincoln!" I echoed in amazement. Then I remembered that the vicar held some appointment at the minster—a prælectorship, or sub-præ-

lectorship, I believe it was called—which took him to the city at stated times.

"In Lincoln," repeated the parson. "Therefore you can have no further business here."

"And have they taken their servants?" I asked. "They would not need the gardener: is he not here?"

"There are men on the premises," he answered, "but you will find the vicar's gardener at his cottage, I dare say."

And he motioned with his hand toward the door.

"Oh, I am not to be so dismissed," I blurted out. "I am Mistress Graves' nephew, Vavasour."

"What effrontery!" cried the parson. "The young gentleman is dead and buried."

"But I am he, I tell you. I have been immured in Melwood Priory, and only escaped this morning."

"If that be so," answered the parson, who evidently did not believe a word of it, "you should appeal to the magistrates."

"Such is my intention. But all my belongings are here. I sent them to my aunt's care seventeen days ago. I beg you to let me have the means of cleanliness, and a change of clothing."

"You must be as much fool as knave, to imagine I shall give my friend's property to the first beggar who chooses to ask for it."

"But I will describe my baggage and its contents," I pleaded.

"Doubtless, doubtless. Perhaps you have an

inventory in your pocket," he replied, with contempt for the tricks of beggars in his tone.

His own words seemed to set him thinking, for he drew out a paper from his pocket, and read it, looking up at me two or three times in the course of reading.

"I have here your description, point by point," said he, when he had finished the perusal, "and your name is given as Jim Ulceby, for whose apprehension a reward is offered. The description tallies precisely, so far as I can see. It makes mention of certain marks on the breast, which may or may not be on yours."

"I bear the marks," I said.

"Oh! You confess it?"

I recounted briefly what had been done to me, ending by a claim that he should aid me as befitted his sacred office. In this I made a great mistake, for the parson waxed hot, declaring my story utterly incredible, and bade me begone. I felt quite sure he would have detained me, if he had had force at command. So I made my way to Daft Jack's cottage by every turn and cross-cut I knew, in hope to elude observation. It stood near one end of a small orchard, thickly planted, a narrow path leading from the orchard gate to the cottage door. I rapped on the door with my knuckles, and heard Jack's high voice tremble as he called "Come in." The room, lighted only by a small window, which a tree overshadowed, was dim to eyes fresh from the sunshine, but I saw Jack seated on a

stool, shoulders bent, hands on knees, face directed toward the door.

"Who are you? Speak," he cried, in a tone of fear.

"An old acquaintance, Jack; not dead, as you may have believed, but sorely in need of friendly help."

Jack sprang out of his posture of fright, and seized my hands.

"I knew it was your step," he almost shrieked. "Oh yes; and it is your voice. You're warm and wick. Oh, Mester Frank, where have you been? And what's come to your face?" The poor fellow trembled, and fell to blubbering, squeezing my hands and gazing up at me.

"I will tell you all about myself shortly, Jack, but I am as hungry as a moudiwarp; how dirty I am, there's no telling. Can you find me soap and water and a scrubbing-brush? And I want some other clothing than these foul rags. Whether my money will go so far, though, is doubtful."

Pulling out the purse which Bess had given me, put me in mind of the warning with which she had charged me.

"But you are to lie snug, Jack, so you cannot do marketing for me. Bess Boswell sent you word that soldiers are prowling about."

Jack chuckled, and taking out of a box a gown and a bonnet, such as our labouring women wear in the fields, he informed me that, indued in these, he became Judy Hoggat, well known to his neigh-

bours; and as his hairless face was womanish enough, when framed and partly concealed in the hood, I judged he might safely do my errands.

An hour later we sat down to meat, I clean and tolerably comfortable in shepherd's garb. When we had eaten and drunk our fill, and I had satisfied Jack's curiosity, I asked for cleat-boards and staff, intending to cross to Sandtoft without delay; but while Jack was getting ready for my journey, I fell asleep in my chair, and slept till four o'clock —too late to go and return to meet Bess, who might have something of urgent importance to tell me. I felt heartily ashamed of my drowsiness, and inclined to be angry with Jack for not rousing me; but he answered my rating with—

"Wouldn't ha' waked you for a hatful of gold. Why, you looked as tired as a dog in a pedlar's cart."

With the dusk came Bess, who had met a troop of carabineers soon after we parted at Belton, and being questioned by the officer, had sent them eastward to Butterwick ferry. Of her father's whereabouts and present business she knew little, beyond the fact that he had gone away in a hurry on receipt of a message from Sheffield. She was disposed to think the message related to Vliet, for Boswell had growled a curse on "all Dutchmen." Bess had ascertained that my friend Portington was at home, and she urged my going to Tudworth under cover of the darkness. My first duty, she held, was to obtain the help and countenance

of friends; and in spite of my longing for sight of Anna, I acknowledged the good sense of the advice, and agreed to set out shortly. I had no sooner said so than we heard the clatter of horses at the trot.

"Soldiers!" exclaimed Bess.

"Judy Hoggat, be ready to slip out," said I.

Jack nodded, and put on his simple disguise. The horsemen drew up with a jangling noise, which certified them soldiers. Heavy footsteps approached the door, and some one knocked as with the butt of a pistol, and called out—

"Open, in the King's name!"

Jack threw it wide. "And what does his Majesty want of poor Judy Hoggat?" he asked, in a quavering, frightened voice. There was no chance for him to escape, for the little orchard was thronged with carabineers.

A grizzled old sergeant strode into the room, followed by three of his men, and answered—

"A better light for one thing. Stir up your fire, my good woman, and bring me a candle."

This done, the sergeant poked the candle in my face.

"Uncover your chest," he ordered. The old fellow examined the marks attentively. "As described," he muttered; but I thought he had the look of being mystified about something.

"Jim Ulceby, you are my prisoner," said he.

"I am not Jim Ulceby, but I yield—under protest."

The sergeant shook his head, as if to imply that my protest was no affair of his, and gave order for my removal. I had time only to ask Bess to let Portington and Drury know of my state, which she promised to do without delay. I begged her also to send the news of me to Mistress Goel, but the soldiers had me out of the cottage before I heard her answer. There is no need to dwell on the particulars of the next few days. The first night I was lodged in a stable-loft at the Bull in Epworth, where we remained until evening, when the sergeant and four carabineers took me to Keadby, which place we left by sloop for Hull on the following day.

Chapter XVII

WE had a tedious passage, for the wind was light, and we missed the advantage of the tide; so it was after six o'clock when we arrived. My guards took me to a large house in Mytongate, adjoining a butcher's shop, the butcher, Acton by name, being the lessee of the prison. When I had been some time in a little den which smelled vilely, my jailer appeared—a lewd fellow, far gone in liquor.

"And you're come to pay us a visit once more," said he, with oaths which I need not repeat. "We have not much accommodation to spare just now, but we must find you a garret somewhere on the old terms, I suppose."

This talk of accommodation was Greek to me. "I don't understand," said I, "not having the honour of your acquaintance."

Acton laughed until his red face turned purple. "Oh, that's good—'nation good! Gentleman Jim—Jim the bully-boy, hasn't the honour of my acquaintance!"

As I stared at him he broke into laughter again, and gave me a resounding smack on the shoulder.

"You do it so well, Jim! Might ha' been born with a coronet on your head! 'Not having the honour of your acquaintance!'" Again he roared.

"You are going out as governor of the colony, are you! Oh, you'll be the death of me with your jests!"

The fellow babbled on of the doings of Ulceby, of cheating at play and other frauds, of street brawls and manslaughter, until he talked himself dry and called for brandy, which was brought by a sluttish wench and placed on the table, the only furniture of the room, save a rickety chair which I occupied. Acton ceased his jabbering in order to drink, and I tried to get in a word; but as soon as he had gulped his dram, he went on unheeding me.

"The old man has more chink than ever, chandling and stockfish bring him in a pretty penny; but now he's gone in for whale fishing in the Greenland sea, and he has the devil's own luck. They say he is down for sheriff next year, but whether he can get you out of this scrape, Lord only knows."

"Of whom do you speak?" I asked.

Acton, seated on the table, was in the act of swallowing more brandy, but my question brought him to his feet, laughing, sputtering and coughing well-nigh to suffocation. When he regained breath, he vowed I was the drollest fellow living. Then he changed his tone to one of drunken gravity, inquiring what money I had, and continued—

"Look ye, Jim, a jest is all very well, but I must see your father's money, or have his word for it, or out you go into the cellars."

I had hard work to draw a plain meaning out of the man, his tipsy head being filled with the notion that I was the "Gentleman Jim" with whom he had such familiarity; but little by little I gathered that Ulceby the elder lived not far away, a man of substance and standing, who had paid his son's debts two or three times, from whom Acton had received a good deal of money for prison fees and food and lodging. This gave me hope of liberty, so I demanded paper and pen and ink, and wrote a few lines, asking Mr. Ulceby of his charity to come to see one, who was falsely imprisoned under the name of his son.

This letter Acton undertook to despatch and relieved me of his presence. Some two hours I spent alone in the darkening room, the wind howling outside with a most melancholy sound, and hearing fitfully a noise of talk and laughing from some room near, whenever a door was opened. About eight o'clock, Mr. Ulceby came in, Acton attending him with much obsequiousness. When the jailer had placed candles on the table and a chair for the visitor, Mr. Ulceby signified his desire to be left alone with me. On the first glance my spirits rose. He was a tall man, somewhat portly, silver-haired, and bore himself with natural dignity. He heard what I had to say of my capture and imprisonment at Melwood, my escape and recapture, with grave attention, two or three times asking a pertinent question, and at the end of it said smiling half sadly—

"One thing can be easily proved. My testimony that you are not my son should suffice, after legal forms have been observed, to obtain your release. That shall be my first business to-morrow morning. Possibly it may take a few days to set you free."

I thanked him heartily for his kindness in coming so speedily to my help; but he cut short my thanks, making light of the matter of his trouble.

"I wish I could take you out of this den of wretchedness," he went on; "but as that is not possible, you must allow me to offer such hospitality as may be had here." He rapped on the table with his cane, and Acton entered. "Can you let us have a more comfortable room and a bit of cheerful fire?" he asked.

Acton intimated that anything could be done which would be well paid for; and Mr. Ulceby sent out to the Saracen's Head for the best supper that could be furnished.

"Mr. Vavasour does me the honour to sup with me," he said to Acton, who favoured me with a knowing wink and went about the business.

Presently we were in a room more spacious and airy, and after supper, Mr. Ulceby gave me a short account of his son, which is no part of my story, except that it was given so tenderly and sorrowfully as to make me sure that here was a good man indeed. He ended by saying—

"There seems little doubt of his death, but I must be certified of it, and if he met with foul

play, bring his murderers to justice. My duty to him can best be fulfilled by a partnership with you. Will you give me confidence for confidence? You have told me of your imprisonment and the horrible practice of your enemies, but nothing of the reason. Since the desire of money, or the love of woman is at the bottom of most mischief, perhaps there is a lady in the case. Believe me, though I am hoary-headed, I am not too old to feel with a true lover."

Of that I felt well assured and poured out all my tale, to which he listened with no sign of weariness, nodding and smiling now and then, and once rising from his chair to pace the room and murmur something to himself. At the end he stretched out his hand, saying—

"Let us strike a bargain. We two are partners until we know the truth concerning the fate of my poor, misguided lad, and you are avenged of your enemies. Now that means," said he, as I put my hand in his, "that there is no distinction between *meum* and *tuum* for the term of our partnership. Nay, hear me," observant of the flush in my face as I thought of my destitute condition. "I may have to ask you for more than money can buy before we are at the end of our joint business. The first thing I offer is counsel. Write a letter to Mistress Goel, assuring her of your safety and of your speedy coming, but saying nothing further, not even where you are, lest the letter should fall into other hands. I will send it by a trusty mes-

senger as fast as good horseflesh ought to be ridden. To-morrow I will bring you a skilful surgeon, who should be able to do somewhat to repair the injury to your face. There will be no loss of time thereby, for your liberation can scarcely be effected to-morrow; and if you have to go plaistered and bandaged, there may be advantage in the disguise. We might dress you like a shipmaster too. We must pounce on the enemy, if we may, for they will stick at nothing, now that you hold their liberty, perhaps their lives, in your hand."

I had nothing to say against these counsels, being in truth very thankful to have a friend capable of advice and one so forward in my cause. Mr. Ulceby laid his purse on the table.

"Such men as you have here to do with, will be the more respectful if they know you have money at command, and you may have unforeseen occasion for it."

When I had written a few words to my love, Mr. Ulceby left me, again assuring me he would bestir himself about my business early in the morning. It was long before I sought sleep, which indeed would have been hard to come by until after midnight, for my fellow-lodgers in the room next to mine, and in the one overhead, kept up such a noise of shouting and singing and laughter as astounded me, seeing they were prisoners. On Mr. Ulceby's departure, a maid looked in to ask whether I had need of anything; and, as I had no orders to give, locked and bolted the door on

the outside, and I was left alone to my meditations.

Hitherto I had not been much given to reflection, and in these later days I had been concerned with the present danger and what might impend in the instant future, but now that the strain was relieved, thought came upon me like a flood. A few hours ago I had been threatened with the fate of a plantation slave. If any man had foretold on my coming of age that such a peril would befall me, how incredible it would have appeared! And I had been saved from such a doom not by the things in which I had pride, not by my name or place, not by my strength or courage, or by the staunchness of my friends, but by the kindness of a stranger. How much reason I had for thankfulness to him, and how much more to the Providence which had sent him for my deliverance! A great awe crept on me of the eye which had been upon me when I had thought myself buried out of sight, and of the hand which had brought me help when I was most helpless; and I felt how utterly undeserved was the kindness of God, and at the same time assuredly confident therein. These things I hold are not to be much spoken of, but some record I am bound to make of that which changed the face of the world to me, and filled my heart with a new, strange, and solemn gladness.

Chapter XVIII

MY liberation did not come to pass so quickly as Mr. Ulceby had hoped, for the justices and the sheriff and the commander of the castle, and I know not how many authorities besides, all had something to say in the matter. After my friend's testimony that I was not his son had been accepted, I supposed I should be set free at once, but no such thing! "If I was not Jim Ulceby, who was I?" "Where was Jim Ulceby?" "How came I to resemble him?" So the authorities demanded, and seemed to think these questions must be answered before they gave me my liberty. One magistrate, whose gravity and dulness were of equal magnitude, took it into his head that a plot of some kind was on foot. If he could have had his way, I believe he would have put me to bodily torture; to torture of mind he often put me, coming to "examine the prisoner," by asking the most absurd questions, looking as solemn as an owl the while. I never understood his drift, nor I believe did he. Mr. Ulceby warned me of this man's first visit, and implored me to endure it with all the patience I could muster; so I contrived to keep my temper, and in the end the ass was good enough to express the judgment "that I was a blind instrument of the conspirators." That there was a conspiracy he was well assured.

Acton gave us some trouble at first, holding that I was in fact his one-time crony, and that Mr. Ulceby had taken the course of denying me, as the one means of saving me from transportation to America. He declared that no man would be at the pains and cost which Mr. Ulceby took on my behalf for a stranger, and claimed "hush-money." When he could not extort that, he did his worst against me secretly. Even when the surgeon had restored me to something more like my former looks, Acton would not be convinced. The surgeon did me good service by giving evidence as to the recent date of the distortion of my face, which was corroborated by the sergeant who brought me to Hull. He testified that he had been perplexed when he arrested me by the freshness of the tattooing and of the scars. But eight days passed before my good friend, who had been unceasing in his exertions in my cause, came with the order for my release. Every comfort which money could procure during those weary days I enjoyed, and Mr. Ulceby gave me as much of his time as might be spared from the business of expediting my deliverance. After the second day of durance I kept to my own room. On that day I had the curiosity to look over the prison. It consisted of two houses which had been thrown into one, and of buildings which occupied two sides of a quadrangle behind them. These buildings would not have been used as stabling by a man who valued his horses. Here the wretches were confined who could not, or

would not, pay for accommodation within the house; some of them kept safely by being laid on the floor with iron bars across their legs; others having liberty to stand upright, but chained to staples in the wall. Some were free to roam the yard, variously ironed and fettered. The most part were half starved and in rags, the most miserable creatures I had ever seen.

The inmates of the house were such as had means to pay the exorbitant charges which the jailer made for food and lodging and fees for this, that, and the other. Many of these had money to waste in gambling and drunkenness, but few had any compassion for their poverty-stricken fellow-prisoners. In this den were prisoners awaiting trial, prisoners under sentence, and prisoners who had been acquitted, now detained for payment of the jailer's charges; prisoners of both sexes and of all ages, from childhood to decrepitude. While I was making the round of the yard, a greasy fellow came to one of the windows, and calling to the crowd, threw out the orts and scraps of his breakfast, for which the hungry wretches scrambled. In the struggle two women fell out and began to fight, tearing, scratching, and biting with the fury of tigresses, while men stood round them laughing and betting as to which would be the victrix. Turning away from this, I came upon a ragged, miserable creature, who lay moaning and whimpering in a corner. He had tried to climb the wall with the aid of a rope which a friend had managed

to convey to him, but had been caught in the effort; so the jailer and his men had beaten the soles of his feet to a horrible condition. A few of the prisoners lay about dead drunk, the objects of the envy of others, who had not the luck to have friends able and willing to give them liquor. Much that I saw and heard is not to be described. I took refuge from the little hell in the solitude of my own room, right thankful I had not been compelled to herd with the vile and wretched crew. In a sense it was lucky for me that Acton held to the belief that I was Jim Ulceby, for he made it loudly known, and so saved me from being molested by the bullies in the house, who feared to meddle with one who had the repute of never failing to pay back in full any ill turn that might be done him.

Not until the fourth day of my incarceration did I receive a letter from Anna, for Mr. Ulceby's messenger had been delayed by one mishap after another, howbeit they need not be set down here. All the day I read and re-read that precious letter, wondering how a pen, which in my hand is an unwieldy tool, came to be such a wand of magic in hers, that I could, in a manner, hear her clear voice, and almost see her sprightly smile and the sudden coming of her tears. I will copy parts of the letter here, for they tell the story far better than it could be told in words of mine.

"When Luke brought me your letter, in which you promised to come on the day following, he

told me of the wickedness of Sebastian Vliet, and I made him repeat the matter in my father's hearing. But when Luke went on to say you had sent a challenge to your would-be murderer, I was almost beside myself with anger that you should risk your life so lightly in fighting with a wretch so infamous. For a brief moment I thought you had slain my love by your folly, but I soon knew it still lived by the sinking at my heart for fear of what might be devised against you by so crafty a coward. When I learned that Vliet had gone to meet you alone and armed only with a sword, you may be sure all his doings were watched as closely as two women knew how to do. It filled me with wonder. But my fears were redoubled by Vermuijden's report of what had happened, which was that you had fled from Vliet in sudden terror, and gone he knew not whither. A lie so gross and palpable made me certain some foul deed had been done, but what I could not guess, and for days I was as one bereft of reason.

"At last came the news of the finding of a body in a pond, said to be yours: but I could not believe you were dead. My father and Martha and Luke thought me distraught with grief, but my heart said you were still alive. And as my wits returned, I questioned Luke particularly about the dead man. That he was of your height and build, and dressed in your clothes were no sufficient proofs to me. I doubted whether fishes alone had disfigured the face beyond knowledge, and the

condition of the man's breast seemed unaccountable. I asked whether there was trace of any deadly wound; and was answered 'None.' How, then, came the body into the pond? If you, even in the dark, had stumbled into the water, you were strong enough to get out again. No one could have thrown you in, unless he had first stunned you with a blow from behind, and there was no mark of such a blow. Luke told me what was found in the pockets: your purse and the coins which it contained, a ring of keys, your penknife, and your seal. But no word of the half of a ninepenny bit. I felt assured my Frank had not thrown away or lost his love-token. So my mind did in some degree confirm my heart's faith, although every one thought my hope the veriest madness.

"And now to tell you a strange thing. The day after that body was committed to the grave, I sat here, wearied out with thinking and wondering, and I saw you stretched on a couch in what looked like a church crypt. You were bound hand and foot, and by the light of a lamp hanging from the wall behind you, I could see blood upon your face. A man came out of the shadowed part of the room, and stood so that he hid your face from me, and then all faded from my sight. I cried out to my father, who sat near me reading, 'Frank is alive! I have seen him.' I described the place and your state to my father, being perfectly sure of the truth of what I had seen. He sought to convince me I had dreamed it, but I knew I had not closed my

eyes; and, besides, there was I know not what of reality in the sight, which would not suffer me to doubt. I sent for Luke, who was in the house at the time, and inquired of him whether he knew of such a room as I had seen, but he could not help me. My own mind ran on the dungeons of Castle Mulgrave, and I gave my father no rest until he ventured with me, professing his desire to consult a book in the earl's library as the reason of our going. I pretended a whim to see the vaults of the castle, and the old nobleman gave order to his seneschal to take me through them, who did so willingly, he and I being great friends. (He it was who gave me my lessons in riding on my first visit to the castle, so you see your one-time jealousy was misplaced.) From him I heard that Lord Sheffield had his abode at present at Normanby, where he led a life less restrained than was possible under his father's roof, which set me thinking that there might be underground rooms there; but my guide assured me there was not so much as a wine-cellar. 'It was,' he said, 'a poor place, but honoured by my lord's residence when heavy drinking and high play and other delights were desired. For the last ten days the revelling had been perpetual.' Had your disappearance anything to do with this merrymaking? I asked myself. I would set Luke to spy upon the comings and goings of his lordship, I resolved, little as he was fitted by nature for the part. But on our return, which was made in safety, I found Martha

in distress about the poor fellow, who had struck his foot with an axe, while chopping wood, and he is even yet hobbling on a crutch. Will it always be that we poor women must depend, even in maddening anxiety, on the aid of men? If I had been free, I should have donned the garb of manhood, and ridden the length and breadth of the Isle to find you, for I had the feeling that your prison was not very far away.

"But at length, three days before your messenger brought me this letter—which I have wet with happy tears, and kissed a thousand times, and held in my hand and looked at, even while I poured out my thanks to God—at length came the beautiful gipsy girl, who had seen you, spoken with you, touched you. I have much to say to you about the dark beauty, and some questions to ask you. Our meeting was a strange one (of that another time), but before long we were sobbing in each other's arms. And we had arranged to follow and find you on the very day your letter arrived."

Of Vliet, Anna had no more to tell than I already knew, that he had been arrested, and that he had escaped and disappeared. She wrote of her father as being wholly taken up with researches and experiments regarding ague, and full of hope to find a preventive against that sickness. Vermuijden had hired a number of the poorer sort of Islonians to work with the Dutch, but their neighbours were so bitter against them for this going

over to the enemy as to render it necessary to provide lodging for them within the settlement. Nevertheless, Anna had confidence that the step would tend to amity and a good understanding in due time.

On the third day after the receipt of this letter, Mr. Ulceby came to me with the order for my release duly signed and countersigned, and as soon as we had settled with Acton, I was once more a free man. My good friend had reckoned on my impatience to be on the road to Sandtoft, and had provided breakfast at the nearest inn, his house being on the other side of the town.

When the meal was eaten, three horses were brought to the door, one for me, one for my friend, and one for his manservant. Mr. Ulceby believed he had been spied upon and followed several times during his visits to my prison, and feared my enemies were on the alert; hence his purpose to accompany me to the Isle.

"Three men, well mounted and well armed, might travel much more safely than a single horseman," said he.

I may here say that there was no need, as we afterwards came to know, of all this care for my protection, Boswell having never counted on my being delivered from the prison.

We rode with no more serious mishap than the shying of my horse at the flapping of a cloth, which a housewife came to her door to shake as we were passing.

We crossed Trent at Burringham Ferry and went by Crowle Causey, it being my intent to see my friend in quarters at the White Hart, and leaving him there, to ride south to Belton, and thence to Sandtoft by the embankment, but this was not his mind. He would have no nay but we should dine together, procure fresh horses, and he and his man go with me to the settlement. Impatient though I was to see my love, I was too much bound to Mr. Ulceby to refuse to do as he would have me, seeing how he had set his heart on this thing. After we had eaten and drunk, we went on our way, and Mr. Ulceby with great delicacy spoke of what I was to do to earn a livelihood. He did not approve my plan of joining myself to a company of adventurers, or of enlisting in the military service of a foreign prince. He had another scheme for me, which was that I should enter into his business, either as his agent and clerk, or, if mercantile affairs were distasteful to me, as supercargo on one of his ships, with a prospect of coming to the command of a vessel, when I had gained a sufficient degree of seamanship. He spoke as if he thought he ought to make excuse for offering occupation so humble to one of my birth and breeding, but pointed out that a competency might much more certainly and speedily be made by such means than by exploring American forests or engaging as a soldier of fortune. And he touched on the need he would have shortly for a partner, whose youthful energy

might supply the lack of his own declining strength. He ended by saying—

"I am but a plain, blunt fellow, Mr. Vavasour, with no more learning than I got at a dame's school, and unused to the ways of gentlefolks, so I trust you will excuse me if I put it badly; but if your heart's desire is to prepare a cage for your singing-bird, I think it will be most quickly gratified by condescending to trade."

Had such an offer been made me only a month before, assuredly I should have rejected it with scorn, but one may learn a good deal in a month, especially if part of it be spent in prison. Even now I had no liking for a seat on an office stool with a pen behind my ear, or going to and fro as a chapman. The command of a ship would be more to my taste truly, though its cargo might be hides or stockfish or whales' blubber. But I was in no case to consider liking and misliking. I had not a penny of my own, or any present likelihood of gaining one, but in the manner Mr. Ulceby had indicated. The clothes I wore, the food I had eaten these ten days, his money had bought; and it was by his kindness and the mercy of God that I was not now groaning in the hold of a slave-ship. So I made him a reply suitable to his generosity, signifying my readiness to undertake such duties as I might prove to be fit for, albeit I had the gravest doubt about the matter, because of my ignorance and want of capacity. This vastly pleased him, and he went on to tell me his mind

had been set on coming to Sandtoft with me, partly because he thought himself better able to lay the matter before Doctor Goel, if I accepted the offer.

"I am older, and used to reason with old folk," he said; and then lapsed into silence, smiling as if he had pleasant thoughts which he kept to himself.

I also inclined to silence. Welcome though the chance was to earn my bread, and maybe something more in time, I could not rid myself of the feeling that it was a dreary destiny for the last of the Vavasours of Temple Belwood to become a fish merchant, notwithstanding I knew so well that a fish merchant might be as worthy and generous a man as any squire in Axholme or in England. Little did I think that in a few hours I should envy the safety and freedom of the poorest quill-driver in the kingdom. Ah, me! if I had had the foreknowledge, it would only have spoiled for me the bit of pure happiness which was soon to be mine.

Chapter XIX

WHEN we landed from the ferry at Sandtoft, Martha and Luke were in waiting for us, and after greetings had passed, I asked the maid what accommodation could be found for Mr. Ulceby and his man.

"That is seen to," answered Martha. "We spied you half an hour ago, and mistress ordered rooms to be prepared for your fellow-travellers. Luke will guide them to their quarters, and bring them to supper presently. You will come with me."

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Ulceby. "Right glad shall I be to rest awhile before supper. 'Tis long since my old bones were rattled with such a stretch of riding. So no hurry about supper, my bonny lass."

He shot a look at Martha, who replied by a smile of understanding, as Luke swung on his crutch to lead my companions to their lodging.

On our way to the doctor's I noted the presence of a number of Islonians among the foreigners, who were trooping into the settlement from their day's work afield, and some of them looked curiously at me. Scarce a word passed between me and the maid, for she had some ado to keep up with my long stride. But when she threw open the door of Anna's sitting-room, she found breath

to say demurely, "Mr. Vavasour." I had had some shrinking under my eagerness to see my love, lest my scarred face, still partly striped with plaister, should give her fright; but there was no sign of that in her beautiful eyes, as she stood waiting for me as near as might be, with allowance of room for the opening of the door, and with a low, soft cry of pity such as mothers use, she came into my arms. After the long embrace of welcome, she held me off, looking into my face some seconds, and then smiling through her tears, called me her brave soldier, her hero, and I know not what, asking a hundred questions, and laughing and crying in a breath, until the only thing I knew was that she was the loveliest woman in the world, and I the happiest of all men to have her love. At length I remembered I kept her standing, and drew her to a chair, kneeling beside her, and she touched my ugly face softly with her lips, and then broke into a gentle rain of tears. Before we had time to talk together, Martha rapped at the door, announcing supper.

We sat long at table, for the doctor, forgetting his studies awhile, asked many questions as I told my tale, and that was long enough. When I came to relate how Mr. Ulceby had befriended me, Anna could not speak her gratitude, but it shone so brightly in her face that the good man answered her—

"The happiness is on my side, Mistress Goel. I am repaid a hundred-fold for such service as I

trust any man would have rendered who happened to have the ability."

She governed the swelling in her throat so far as to rejoin—

"Methinks the good Samaritan would have said much the same."

Supper ended, and the main of my story told, Mr. Ulceby pleaded weariness as a reason for going off to his quarters, whither we went with him, Anna being wishful to assure herself nothing was omitted for his comfort. When we had left him we paced to and fro under the starry sky in talk of the future. Anna did not approve of my entering Mr. Ulceby's service.

"Believe me, Frank, it is not the consideration that you are a gentleman by long descent that weighs with me," she said, "and I hope I am not wanting in thankfulness to this good man who has been so much your friend. I could give him anything else, but not my Frank to be a slave. For that is what it would be. There would not be some things to bear in Mr. Ulceby's counting-house which Virginian slaves endure, but the life would be little better than theirs—for you. You would have to do not only with Mr. Ulceby, but with his clerks and servants; and every one of them would despise you for your ignorance of his little knowledge, or hate you for being a gentleman, or both. And how could you bring your mind or body to sustain the confinement and the weary sameness of mechanical drudgery?"

I need not record what I said on the other part, since I was not fated to the course I would have taken. I put down Anna's words of wisdom for love's sake, though I yet believe that the pride which she disowned had more influence with her than perhaps she knew. And to tell the truth I loved her none the less on that account.

My prudent lady would have me beware lest, in my haste to be honest and desire to prove my gratitude, I should imperil all our future; it might take time to find employment more genial and suitable, but she doubted not it would be found. She would like to speak with Vermuijden, who at this time was in command of the settlement. This led her to say that the Islonian labourers, who had been hired by him, had been so much persecuted by their neighbours that it had been necessary to find them lodging within the pale, where they had come to good terms with the Dutch, and to a particular kindness toward her father and herself. Bess Boswell had left her father and her tribe, and for the present had shelter in Sandtoft. Of these and other matters, which need not be written, we talked until late.

When I went to my chamber I found my sword and pistols laid in readiness by my bedside, and smiled at the superfluous care of Luke, who, I supposed, had placed them there. Through the open casement of my window came the rustle of leaves and the whisper of the wind among the reeds, and once or twice a faint twitter of some bird

dreaming on his perch. The stillness was sweet to ears which had been vexed o' nights with the noise of drunken gamblers, horse-laughs, and oaths and shouting. The holy quietness and my happy thoughts soothed me soon to sleep, from which I was awakened by a great glare of fire through the window. Before I had gathered my wits, I heard a shuffling as of many feet, and as I sprang out of bed and huddled on my clothes, a shot rang, then other shots were fired, and a general hubbub arose. As I opened my door, Doctor Goel came out of the room opposite to mine, candle in hand, and Anna and her maid appeared immediately afterwards. We descended to the parlour together, the uproar without increasing every moment, shouts in Dutch and in English, clash of steel, crash of stones against woodwork, discharge of firearms, roar and crackle of burning, and the trampling of a mob hither and thither. It was the more confounding to me that I had observed on entering the settlement how guns had been placed to command the gates, and the doctor had mentioned other means of defence which had been adopted since the last assault. I said something of this, and Anna answered—

"Do you not hear the cry 'Treachery'? The Islonians have opened the gates, after over-powering the guard."

I blew out the candle, and then drew one of the shutters back a little way, and looked out. By the blaze of some building which I could not see, but

which some one said must be the guard-house, everything was illumed almost as if by daylight. The thick of the tumult was now at some distance beyond us westward, but men were fighting in twos and threes here and there quite near us. I had said something of rushing out to bring Mr. Ulceby and his man to our company, when a rabble of men and women came up, crying, "The witch!" and in the forefront of them the madwoman and another old hag capered and yelled like demons. They were guided by some one who knew the doctor's house, for I had no sooner closed and bolted the shutter than they began to smash the window-panes, redoubling their cries. Pressing danger will at times quicken my slow wits, but I was at a non-plus now. The best that I could do, methought, was to stand at bay and hope for some unforeseen deliverance. And in truth that seemed nigh at hand all on a sudden. The rabble screamed and shouted as if they were being driven off. Several shots banged close to our ears. A thundering rap was made at the door, and Sheffield's voice called out—

"Doctor Goel, open; it is I, your friend Sheffield."

"Yes, open, doctor," said I, "but say nothing of me. God sends devils on His good errands sometimes."

As the doctor groped his way to the door, I stepped out into the passage, and back to the other end of it, so as to see with little chance of being

seen. When the door opened to give Sheffield entrance, I caught a glimpse of some of his men well armed, and, beyond them, of the baffled crowd.

"All in darkness, doctor?" said Sheffield, and called for a lantern, which one of his men handed to him.

I screened myself within a doorway. When he and the doctor had entered the parlour, I drew near enough for eavesdropping, and heard my lord's mocking speech.

"Yes, Mistress Goel, it is I, the slighted, scorned, rejected Sheffield, who come to your aid. A warning reached me that another attack in force was about to be made on the settlement, most unfortunately too late for me to obtain military strength sufficient to disperse the rioters; but hearing a rumour that some of the wretches intended especial mischief to you under cover of the general assault, I rode with such of my own knaves as were within call to your rescue. My devotion is proof even against your disdain, beautiful Anna. Come, I have a horse saddled for your riding, and I and my stout fellows will conduct you to a safe asylum."

"Have you a horse for my father, my lord? And for my friend Martha?"

"I' faith, no, my charmer. I could not at a moment's notice provide for a whole household, but I will leave two or three musketeers for their defence."

"Thank you, my lord, I will share their protection and my father's danger."

"Not so, madame; I leave not one of my troop, unless you ride with me. Think what you do. The howling devils outside will tear you limb from limb, or burn you over a slow fire. They have sworn you shall not escape them this time."

"But they will not dare to do me hurt, or if they dare, will not be able, as long as my lord Sheffield and his men defend me."

"There you are utterly mistaken. We could not hold out against them here. Half a dozen of us might suffice as an escort perhaps, when once we have crossed the ferry. The rest of my men shall return to guard your father and your maid."

"I will not leave them, my lord."

"But, by Heaven, you shall, if I have to drag you off by main force."

And then I heard the clanking of spurred heels and a movement of other feet, the doctor's voice crying, "Hold! Stand back, sir," and in the same instant my love cried, "Frank!"

"As well call upon one of the damned!" cried Sheffield, with a hideous laugh.

Now, although I was in a white heat of fury, I remembered that the men outside might hear any loud noise in the room, in spite of the uproar around them, and, if they were brought in on me, there would be little likelihood of saving my love. Nor did I wish to do murder, if I could rescue her without it, so I drew no weapon as I rushed into

the room. As I entered, Sheffield thrust the doctor violently aside, and seized Anna round the waist, his back being toward me. Whether he heard my step, or something in Anna's face caused him to turn round, I know not, but he faced about, and for a moment stood as if terror-struck; but, recovering himself with amazing coolness, he pulled a pistol from his belt. Quick though he was, I was quicker. Catching his right hand with my left, I struck him a blow with my right, which, in turning to avoid, he received on the side of his head, and fell all his length as stiffly as a ninepin falls. I held up my hand to enjoin silence while I bent over him, and saw that he had been stunned.

I was in some perplexity what was next to be done, when some one touched my shoulder, and on turning round I saw Bess Boswell. She whispered rapidly—

"Follow me as silently as you can, women first, men in the rear, doing just as I do."

She took up the lantern and led the way to the back of the house, hiding the light under some part of her dress as we came to the kitchen door, when she zig-zagged from one bit of shadow to another, now of a pile of wood, now of a bush, now of a tree, for there was a great glare of red light over all the settlement by this time.

We gained the stockade without being followed —or so we hoped—and then, one by one, we slipped through the gap, hidden by the willows

which Luke had used to find so convenient. On the other side of the fence we were in sheltering darkness, and in some measure secure. Then Bess let us know what she would be at.

"There was a boat hereabout yesterday; if you can get by water to Belshaw, that will give you a good start, for there's no crossing the fen just now, and the mob must go a long roundabout to catch you, even if they see you."

"How did you come to our aid just in the nick of time?" I asked.

"I heard what the mob were shouting as they made for the doctor's house, and was running to be there before them, when I saw Lord Sheffield and his men ride up and drive the crowd back. I felt sure that meant mischief. When he had posted his men and gone in alone, I walked up boldly and told the fellows I was required to attend a lady. They grinned and let me pass. I bolted and barred the door behind me, making as little noise as I could. When I had done that, I perceived you, for I can see like a cat. So I waited to know what your game might be, ready to play it according to your lead. Now we must find the boat quick."

Bess it was who found it, and a pair of oars and a pole. We got in as quickly and quietly as possible in the darkness—all but Bess, who stooped to push us off.

"Come with us," said Anna.

"Nay, the load is heavy enough for one pair of

oars," she answered, "and I may be of service best by staying here."

"Not so; come with us, Bess, I beg," said I, speaking in fear of what might befall her if she remained, the Mulgrave men and the mob knowing, as they were like to do, that it was by her means we had got away.

She stepped into the stern, gave a thrust of the pole against the bank, and I plied the oars with my best strength and skill. As soon almost as we shot out of the darkness into the glare, a loud voice, which I knew was Boswell's, shouted—

"There they go—the witch and the murderer of Lord Sheffield! A fortune to the man that takes him dead or alive!" and at the same time the fence became alive with figures, which for an instant stood black against the light, and then dropped into the darkness where we had been a minute before, reappearing swiftly, some on one bank, some on the other.

Our Islonians were too well accustomed to wading and swimming to be hindered long by water, and they scrambled up the banks at a great rate and ran after us, firing and throwing stones as they ran, until the order was shouted—

"Run ahead, you fools, and then stand and fire."

"Cower low," said I to my company in the boat, pulling with all my might, the sweat pouring down my face.

All obeyed but Bess, who stood up in the stern with the pole in her hands.

We had sped some furlongs under a continual rain of stones and bullets, and whether any one was seriously hurt I did not know, nor even whether I myself had been hit or not, when we were delivered from those of our pursuers who were on my right hand, by their plunging into a bog. Another furlong, and we might escape the others by turning into the Belshaw stream.

While I was saying so to myself—for my panting would not suffer me to say it aloud—the doctor groaned. A minute later a sting in my left arm nearly forced me to let go the oar. Soon after Martha made a moaning cry.

"Crouch, Bess—crouch," I tried to say, but knew not whether she heard. She took no heed if she did, and as at last we neared the mouth of the smaller stream, she struck something in the water; what I could not see, for we were now surrounded by the darkness. Again she struck. Then she turned and said, "Ease a little."

A great yell rent the night from the Idle bank, as our enemies discovered that we had left them in the lurch. Even if they crossed the Idle, they could not hope to pursue us further over the swamps which bordered our little river.

"I pulled slowly awhile to make sure of being beyond their reach before stopping to know what hurt had been taken by us. We could not see, for our lantern had burned out, or been smothered in the folds in which Bess had enwrapped it. Anna, who sat nearest me, affirmed she had suffered

nothing worse than a few bruises; the doctor had a wound in the left shoulder, which was bleeding freely, he said; Martha had been struck on the head with a stone, but now felt better; Bess assured me she had no serious injury, which I could scarce believe, exposed as she had been. Well it was for the rest of us that she had risked herself so boldly. Twice, in spite of the ready pole, some of our pursuers had swum out from the bank to lay hold of our craft, and had gone under with cracked crowns. All would have been over with us if they had clutched the gunnel.

Something of this I was saying, when Bess cried, "Cease rowing a moment."

As she spoke, a hoarse sound of cheering came to our ears, and as it died away we caught a faint noise of dipping oars, which grew more distinct while we listened.

"Some of them are following in a boat," said Bess. "Hand me your pistols, and row on."

"Look to the priming," said I, as I passed the weapons and bent again to the oars. There could be no going fast, for the stream twisted about sharply at this part, and the darkness was thickened by alders and willows which leaned over the water, so that I had to feel my way slowly, lest I ran the boat aground. Happily, I knew every bend and shallow well, having been out on the stream duck-shooting scores of times, though never in such gloom as now. My hope was that our pursuers might be less familiar with its windings, in which

case they might stick on a shoal, or foul a bush long enough to give me time to cross a "broad," which lay a little ahead.

Out on open water, a boat rowed by three or four men would be sure to overtake us, unless we had a long start of them; but if I could cross the "broad" before they came up with us, I had some hope of winning the race; for the remainder of the stream twisted about in a manner full of difficulty to those who did not thoroughly know its course. Just as the channel widened, and I was revolving in my mind by what dodge I might elude our pursuers, they broke out into loud curses, and I guessed what had happened to them. The stream forked a little way behind us, and one branch soon ran shallow over a bed of pebbles. If one pushed over this, one came to a bed of weeds which was quite impassable. Our pursuers, I imagined, had come to the shallow, and I hoped they would go forward. We could hear they were disputing and quarrelling. So I was assured of the long start I wanted, and pulled cheerily across the mere, rousing the waterfowl by thousands, to the astonishment of Anna, who had never heard such a thunderous flapping of wings and such a tumult of screaming, quacking, and cackling.

We gained the entrance to the further stream in safety, and I felt confident we should reach Belshaw before the other boat could come up with us. Not that we should be out of danger there, since it was more than likely some of the mob would go

round by the embankment and the road, if they had an inkling of our destination, but they could not possibly arrive for an hour or so, which would give us time either to go elsewhere, or to take shelter and send a message to Belton, where there were many stout fellows who would come to the rescue, if they could be brought to believe that "t' young squire" still lived and stood in danger. So I said, encouraging my friends, and as I spoke the sky began to redden a little in the east. In half an hour we were in sight of Drury's place, and a few minutes more brought us to the landing. Nothing could we see or hear of the other boat, and everything was peaceful enough, except Drury's pigs, which were clamouring for their breakfast.

Chapter XX

WHEN we looked to our hurts we were astonished at the slightness of them. My shoulder had been struck by a bullet on the rebound, which had penetrated but a little way and was easily removed; Anna had escaped with a few bruises; Martha's cut on the head was nasty, but not serious. We had a laugh over the doctor's wound, which could not be discovered, nor was there a spot of blood anywhere on his clothing. He must have been splashed with water, which he had imagined was his own blood. Bess had had very much the worst injuries, her hands and arms and face being bruised and cut badly, but the doctor shook his head chiefly at a bruise on her breast. How she had kept firm grip on pole and pistol after that sickening blow—nay, how she had held up at all, he declared he did not understand. She smiled and said he had not been used to doctoring gipsies. While Doctor Goel attended to us, I sent a lad to bring such of my old servants and neighbours as might be willing to help me against the mob, which I felt sure would appear shortly. Boswell would stir them on with all his craft, I knew. Happily, it had already been made known that it was not I who had been buried in the Belton churchyard, and my friends

were ever talking of me, Dame Drury assured me. Her husband begged me to go away, and when he found I would not budge, he growled at the risk he ran of losing property, and perhaps of seeing his house in flames, in a quarrel which was none of his. Dame Drury took a more cheerful view of the matter, being sure that "t' young squire" would not see them come to harm in the end. She bustled about to get breakfast for us, and while we were eating it, she told me that "cousin John was all of a dither" in his great desire to see me, and begged the young lady would honour him by going with me to his chamber. He lay fully dressed, as his custom was, on his couch, trembling with eagerness, and, to my amazement, he half rose from his bed to greet Anna, to whom he spoke with a courtly grace peculiar to him above all the men I have ever known.

In answer to his inquiries, I ran over the main events of the last month, and let him know how things stood with us at present. A great hurrahing rose outside, and when I went to the window I saw about fifty men, all, or nearly all, armed with guns and poles. On sight of me they cheered madly again and again. They were Beltonians, full of friendliness for me, and more than willing for a fray.

"Tell us what you want with us, Mister Frank," some one called out.

"Tell off three men," I replied, "one to watch on the upper road, one on the lower road, and one

at the landing-place to watch the river. If any one sees the mob coming, let him fire as a signal. I'll tell the rest my tale and what help I ask of you."

Three men marched off at once to do my bidding.

"Friends and neighbours," I began, "we have no time to waste, so I will be brief. As you know, it was given out that I was dead, and a man was buried under my name in our churchyard; but I had been kidnapped and carried off to Melwood Priory. There my enemy cut and carved my face to make me look the picture of the man who had been buried as Frank Vavasour. And I was marked on the chest as he had been marked. See"—and I threw open my vest. "This devilish bit of cunning was done to make me pass as a man who was under sentence of transportation to Virginia as a slave. But why? Because I loved a young lady on whom Lord Sheffield had set his fancy." Here I had to stop while my hearers groaned and eased their feelings with some strong language. "My lord thought it would punish me for my presumption, and also leave the lady at his mercy, if I were so disposed of. But I broke my prison." The men hurrahed until I held up my hand. "After all, I was caught, and taken to Hull to lie in prison until the ship was ready to sail. There God sent me a friend, who delivered me, and only last evening I came to Sandtoft to see my lady. In the night, as I dare say you know, an attack was made on the settlement. I believe

it was egged on by my Lord Sheffield. Certain I am that his agents stirred up some foolish people to mob my lady as a witch, on purpose that he might come with some of his retainers to carry her off to Normanby House, under pretence of rescue. He did not know I was on the spot. When I stepped forth to save her from his clutches, he drew pistol. Now I give you my word that, though I had sword by my side and pistol in my belt, I touched neither. I knocked him down, and he fell stunned."

"Same as if a horse had kicked him, I warrant," said a voice.

"Now they give out that I killed him."

"Mighty good riddance!" shouted another voice.

"Well, I didn't wish to kill him, and I don't believe I did; but if I did, I am willing to give myself up——"

"Nay, that you shan't!" came from several parts of the group.

"I am willing to give myself up to the coroner, or any one who has a just right to try me, but not into the hands of my enemies, who have been the tools of my Lord Sheffield, for it is too much their interest to have my life."

"Mustn't be taken to torture chamber!" a voice called out.

Torture chamber was the people's name for the dungeon in Castle Mulgrave, where the Lord President of the Council of the North was wont to examine prisoners. From that chamber men

had come with maimed limbs and shaken wits, men whose only crime was their unwillingness to give the testimony which his lordship desired.

"I don't think there is much fear of that with so many brave fellows to stand by me; but if I should be taken or killed, I beg you to defend this lady and her father until they are under the roof of the Vicar of Crowle."

So saying, I drew Anna forward to the window. My words had taken the colour out of her face and set her trembling, but she spoke with a clear voice—

"Oh, I am sure you will not let him be killed or taken!"

The sight of her pale face, and the sound of her sweet tones uttered from quivering lips, roused the men to the highest pitch, and they answered with one voice—

"Never—never!"

So I went to work about our defence, placing twenty men round the house, under such shelter as we could find or make with bundles of reeds from Drury's stack, or anything that came handy. Twenty more I disposed in a half circle about fifty yards away, facing the road by which the enemy must come. Five of our best shots I appointed to guard the approach by the river, strictly charging them not to leave their post; and the remainder of our men, twelve in number, I sent to the higher ground overlooking the road, so as to be ready to take our enemies on the flank.

After our disposition had been made, we were reinforced by sixteen men, whom I sent to join the twelve on the higher ground; bidding them hide themselves until they heard three blasts from a horn, when they were to fire and charge down the hill. I had meant to take the command of this part of my force myself; but as young Mell came in the last company, and he was both cool-headed and courageous, I entrusted him with it. We had ample time for our preparations, for we saw nothing of an enemy before seven o'clock, when there came in sight a big, disorderly crowd—about a hundred men in number as near as I could reckon—armed with poles, crossbows, slings, knives, and a few guns. Two or three women accompanied the band.

A little way up the slope, above my semicircle of men, stood an old pollard willow, which I climbed as a post of observation, keeping my body in the shelter of its trunk, and having my face well shielded among the young shoots. I could see no Mulgrave livery in the crowd, so I concluded Boswell held the earl's men in reserve. The mob came along in a straggling fashion, and did not appear to look for any kind of defence outside the house, or to note our preparations, so well were my men covered. When they came within fifty or sixty paces, I cried, "Halt, or we fire."

The foremost of them stood and stared; but those behind pressed them forward. Some of them espied me, and sent a shower of bolts and

stones about my head. At the same moment my men fired, and a dozen of the enemy fell. This, or some command from the middle of the crowd, brought them to a stand long enough for my men to reload and prime. There was no howling or yelling on the part of the others, which assured me of the presence among them of men who understood something of discipline. I heard a low buzz of talk among them, and then Boswell came to the front.

"Give me a hearing, you men of Belton. We have no quarrel with you. We want the murderer of my Lord Sheffield," he shouted.

"And the witch!" bawled and screamed a score of voices.

"And the witch," added Boswell.

"Steady, men. Don't let him draw your fire," said I. "There's a rush coming. Shoot, and retire."

The words were scarce out of my mouth, when the mob hurled a volley of shots, stones, and bolts very much at random, and made forward at a run. Again more than a dozen of them dropped under my men's fire; but the rest continued the charge, breaking into shouts of triumph as they saw my Beltonians run to cover. Their shouts changed to yells and curses, as they received a well-directed fire from the second ring, and I hoped they would turn and run. But they came on, more enraged than daunted by their losses, and we were quickly engaged in a hand-to-hand fight, in which, strange

to say, I had little active share, for four of my men gave me to understand they were my bodyguard, and they stuck to me so closely that I could not make play with my stout ash pole. So I made the best use of my eyes and ears, and it was well that I was compelled to do so, for while we were being swept to and fro, smiting and stabbing in a wild medley, some twenty-five or thirty horsemen came galloping along the lower road—Mulgrave men—with long muskets.

I blew my horn thrice, and the sound almost stopped the fight round the house. Up rose the trusty Mell and his men, and one half of them fired. Before the Mulgrave fellows could handle their pieces, four or five saddles were empty and two or three horses were down. The second half of Mell's men fired, while their comrades were reloading, with equal effect. The earl's retainers were not valiant enough to await a third volley, but fled helter-skelter the way they had come, all but those who could neither ride nor run. Mell followed them out of my view, and our scrambling struggle, which had slackened for the last few minutes, went on again fiercely.

There was a sort of method in the fighting of the Boswell party: they tried hard to drive or draw us to the rear of the house. Seeing this, I and my bodyguard worked round toward the front, and as we were doing so we heard a shot and a cry, "This way, Belton men!" The voice was John Drury's, I could swear. We rushed

round, and for an instant stood as if thunder-stricken, for, sure enough, there was John Drury at the landing-place, bare-headed, his face of a death-like pallor, raising gun to shoulder.

About fifty yards down stream were three boats filled with men. Some of them fired at us as we ran up to John, but did no hurt to any of us, while his shot brought down its man. Two of our men, who had disengaged themselves from the hurly burly, now loaded their guns and fired on the boats. To my unspeakable relief, Mell and his men ran up to our assistance, and poured such a steady fire on them as quickly drove them out of range.

Leaving four men with John to guard against their return, the rest of us ranged ourselves in line at a little distance from the scuffling mass, and I shouted—

"This way, friends, and leave the rascals to us."

Most of our men obeyed promptly, and as soon as they had got out of the throng reloaded their guns. We were now the stronger party, about sixty, with firearms. The others had more men disabled than we, so that in numbers we were nearly equal; but they were at a disadvantage in the matter of weapons, and not a little disheartened by rough handling and the discomfiture of the horsemen, as I gathered by the curses which I overheard on "the mongrel curs."

So when I bade them throw down their weapons, they pitched poles, knives, crossbows, guns to the

ground. They showed some surprise at my picking them out one by one, bidding each go about his business, but to take his part in carrying off their wounded men. In this way I let go all but Boswell and thirteen gipsy fellows, whom I had securely bound and laid far apart one from another. Boswell I bestowed safely in an outhouse under the watch of two guards. My purpose in this was to learn the truth about Jim Ulceby's death. As soon as the prisoners had been dealt with, I sent some of my men to Crowle to ascertain whether Mr. and Mrs. Graves were at the vicarage; some to Sandtoft to learn how things stood there, and particularly to inquire for Mr. Ulceby; and some to Butterwick to glean what tidings they might of the action of the earl with regard to his son's death.

Doctor Goel, assisted by Anna and her maid, had attended to the half-dozen of our men whose injuries demanded a surgeon's care, and Dame Drury, with her grumbling husband's help, was busy supplying food and drink to our good friends. Now I had leisure to question John concerning the marvel of his rising from the bed on which he had lain helpless so long.

"I know no more than you," he answered. "I lay at the window, in a bad humour enough that I was as useless as a log, looking out over the fen, and I saw boats on the river. The men you had posted at the landing-place had disappeared—gone to join their comrades in the fray, I suppose. I called out, but nobody heard, and the boats drew

nearer and nearer; if they were not beaten back you would be taken unawares by a fresh attack. Without thinking about the wonder of it, I sprang off my bed, rushed downstairs, took my cousin's gun, and ran out. 'Twas the will of Heaven, a miracle on your behalf, and on mine."

I feared his strength, so suddenly restored, might as suddenly fail, but it did not. So far as we could see, he was hale and vigorous, and as active as any man among us. The doctor cheered us by saying that in a number of such recoveries, which were well attested, the cure had been lasting. I spoke of my astonishment on seeing John move as if to rise when I took Anna to his chamber.

"Now you speak of it, I remember that," said John; "and it makes my restoration to accord with ancient precedent. An angel was sent to heal me. 'Tis a miracle in proper form and order."

Though he spoke so lightly, the shining in his eyes were eloquent of feeling too deep for words.

In the course of the day, our scouts returned with the information that the vicar of Crowle had returned to his parish; that the Dutch had driven off the invaders of their settlement, and Mr. Ulceby would shortly arrive; that the old earl was said to be half mad with rage and grief, and had issued proclamation of a hundred pounds reward for my apprehension and of severe punishment for any person who should aid or harbour me. As President of Council he declared me an outlaw for having resisted the King's authority with violence,

plotted against the life of the royal commissioner, and murdered Lord Sheffield. Orders had been given that all ports were to be watched, and all outgoing vessels to be searched, and these orders were being carried north, south, east, and west with all speed. Warrants had been issued for the arrest of Doctor Goel, his daughter and servants. Mr. Ulceby and his man rode up while we held debate over these tidings.

The first thing, it seemed to me, was to send away the Beltonians, who might be held the less blamable for protecting me and my friends, if they could prove they had dispersed on hearing the terms of the earl's proclamation. With a good deal of difficulty, I prevailed on the brave fellows to leave us. The next question was how to convey my lady and her father and servant to a place of safety, and Mr. Ulceby proposed they should ride with him to Hull, where he would put them aboard one of his own ships bound for Amsterdam; and the doctor now being free to return to Holland, it was so agreed. Anna besought me to go along with them, but as I was sure that my being with them would be likely rather to hinder their escape than to favour mine, I did not consent. John Drury promised to accompany them as far as Hull, and to bring me word when they were out of Humber. My lady would fain have had Bess go with her, now that she had cut herself off from her own people, but Bess would not, and said she had already engaged to render certain services to Dame

Drury, for which she was to receive food and shelter.

"But what is your intent?" asked John, turning to me.

"To hide in a retreat not far away, which is impossible of access to any one who does not know the road, and it needs wary walking, even when one does know it, for it winds through quaking bog and mire-pits and hidden pools."

"You mean Lindum," said Bess. "No one knows the way but the hermit."

"You are mistaken, Bess," I answered. "Daft Jack knows it well, and so do I. I spent a week there last autumn, and promised the hermit I would spend another with him this year. I shall be in safety there, and when the hue and cry is over, I will make my way to Holland."

"I think your plan is admirable," said John. "It is the last place in the world your enemies will think of, and if they find you are there by any chance, they will be much at a loss to get at you. I will remain here in readiness to join you when it is prudent to break cover. Has the hermit pigeons, do you know?"

"Flocks of them."

"Then you have but to bring a few to Messic Mere, or send them by your host, and I shall be provided with messengers in case of need. I will be on the water early on Wednesday, and every day after, until I see or hear from you."

Then arose question what to do with our prison-

ers, and in particular with Boswell. On going to look into the outhouse in which he had been confined, I found the place empty. When the Beltonians withdrew I forgot Boswell, and he had contrived to escape. This hastened our proceedings. With so wily an enemy at liberty, and perhaps spying upon us, it was needful to be as quick and crafty as we knew how to be. In dealing with the other men, we took counsel with Bess, who bade me and John talk roughly to them of our intent to shoot them, and while we were threatening, up came she to make intercession for them, and to promise on their behalf that they would take no part against us, if we spared their lives. She swore them to this in words which the gipsies consider most binding. So I bade her release them at a time when I hoped the travellers would be well on their way. Mr. Ulceby gave up for the present the endeavour to ascertain the truth concerning his son's death, John Drury vowing to search out the matter on his return.

It was not easy to find horses for the party going to Hull. Mr. Ulceby and his man had their roadsters, and John was to take my Trueboy, who was much too frisky after his long idleness, though John had seen to it that he had some exercise every day, to be ridden by a novice. Drury had two horses, one a decent nag, on which the dame went to market, and this we saddled for Anna. The other was too old and heavy for our use, but John caught a sober steed which had carried one

of the Mulgrave troopers, and induced the doctor to mount him, taking Martha on pillion. They trusted to doing better in Belton.

Leave-taking had to be short, and for once I was glad that so it must be, for my love was more despondent than I had ever known her.

"To go over sea and leave you, encompassed with so many perils and pursued by enemies so bitter and cunning and cruel, nearly breaks my heart," said she. "Be persuaded to come with us, Frank."

"That will I not, sweetheart, for there will be sharp watch kept for me at the port; and if you and your father are seen with me, there will be small hope of your gaining your country, whereas now you may be protected by a man well known."

I tried to comfort her by reminding her how marvellously I had been helped and delivered hitherto; but she took no cheer, saying that I had never before been in such evil plight; again and again entreating me to go with them, so that I was driven to be hard with her, for, indeed, every minute of delay was dangerous. Thus it fell that we parted hurriedly at the last, and she rode away very sorrowful.

When she had passed out of my sight, I made haste to prepare for my journey, Bess and the dame assisting me. They found clothing for me in which I looked like a marshman, and put more plaister on my face, the better to disguise me. I took gun, pistols, pole and knife, flint and tinder,

a pair of cleat-boards, and a good supply of powder, and thought I had all I could need; but the dame would have me take a pasty and a bottle of wine.

"Nay, dame," said I, "there is no occasion to carry victual for my short journey."

"Call yourself a marshman, and don't know how short journeys turn out to be long ones! Many a man has rued he did not take meat and drink with him when he set out to cross fen."

So, not to vex the kind soul, I added her provision to my load, and set off within an hour of sunset for the hermitage of Richard Bland, who was commonly called by the few who knew him "the Wizard" or "the Madman" of Lindholme.

Chapter XXI

THERE is no need for me to make a long story of how I fared across the fen to Messic Mere, and, borrowing a punt belonging to Hollings (without the owner's leave, not daring to show myself), poled up the river Torne to within half a mile of Wroot, and then struck northward over the quaking bog to Lindholme. I missed the right turn more than once, and had some pretty tough work to do in getting on the track again, and some narrow escapes from hidden pools and mire-pits; but I reached Lindholme before darkness fell.

It is an island of gravelly limestone, surrounded by a sea of bog, soft as sponge and full of water, on which I should not have ventured, although I knew the course to take, but for my present peril. For nine months of the year, Lindholme was then as much cut off from the rest of the world as if it had been a lonely rock in mid-ocean, for ever beaten by stormy waves. In the winter it was accessible by flat-bottomed boats, and during a hard frost one might walk over, or go on skates. The islet is about three-quarters of a mile long and an eighth of a mile wide. Toward the northern end it rises into a small hill, near the foot of which there is a spring of clear, sweet water. How it

comes to pass that there is such a spring, when all the water in the bog around it is as brown as October ale, I do not understand. At the time of which I write, a grove of oaks grew north of the hill, and a pretty thick plantation of willows and alders occupied the southern tongue of the island. The hermit inhabited a stud-bound house with three rooms, roughly but curiously furnished. A little way off stood a row of buildings—three low hovels of stone and half a dozen wooden huts of different sizes. Here lived the hermit's servants —a man and his wife and their son, a big lad of sixteen or seventeen years of age. Here, too, were kept the hermit's farm-stock—a small bull and four cows, a dozen sheep, and a large number of poultry.

Bland, or rather his man and boy, cultivated abut one half of the soil of his domain with plough and spade, getting amazingly heavy crops of corn and pulse.

The hermit was of middle stature, perhaps five feet eight inches, strongly built, not remarkable but for his face, which was strangely irregular, as though it had not been finished in the making. His nose was not to be described as Roman, or aquiline, or by any term commonly used in speaking of that feature. A child might make one like it in modelling a face in clay. His mouth was large, the lower lip hanging. The eyebrows projected far over his eyes, which had a peculiar look, due, as one found on close observation, to the fact

that the pupil of one was of a bluish grey and that of the other almost black. His abundant dark hair and great beard were streaked with silver.

Rumour assigned various causes for his lonely life, as that he had been crossed in love; that he had been betrayed by a friend; that he had sold himself to the devil. I had made acquaintance with him on Messic Mere one day, when we happened to meet as both of us were fishing for pike, and we fell into anglers' talk. He asked me to his house, promising me rare sport in fowling, and he made good his word during a week which I spent with him. We were much too busy by day, and sometimes by night, for discourse on anything but our sport, and, when not so engaged, we were too sleepy for conversation, so I knew no more of him than that he was an accomplished sportsman, and, as one saw by his fields and barn and stacks and livestock, a good farmer, though his way of doing things was new and strange to me.

As I now drew near the hermitage, the dogs rushed out, a mastiff and a nondescript more like a lurcher than any breed I knew. At first, they came on furiously, but quickly knew me and changed their fierceness for welcoming bark. Bland came to his door, seeming surprised by their friendliness to a stranger, but he too knew me as soon as I spoke, and received me with all kindness. He looked with some curiosity at my plaistered face and marshman's attire, but he asked no question, making me welcome to share his evening

meal. I judged it best to tell him I had fled from pursuit, and that a price was set on my head, and a ban laid on any one who might aid and harbour me. He laughed a loud, sharp laugh, which scarcely changed his countenance.

"You are none the less welcome for all that," said he. "Here we defy the mad world's law. Eat your supper, and afterwards you shall tell me as much as you choose."

When my host had heard the reason of my flight, he again assured me of my welcome.

"Stay with me as long as suits you—the longer the better, so far as I am concerned. Now that our work of harvesting is over, I am free to enjoy myself in your company all day long, and what sport Lindholme can give you already know."

Thanking my cordial host, I settled down to life in Lindholme, until it might be possible to make a dash for freedom and safety abroad.

On the Wednesday, Bland would not hear of my venturing to Messic Mere, as I had engaged to do, but he went himself and brought John Drury to Lindholme, and conducted him to the Mere again in the evening.

John gave me the comforting news that my lady and her father had got away to sea without let or hindrance. Mr. Ulceby sent me word that he would have a vessel of some sort ready to convey me to Holland, whenever it might be prudent for me to try to leave England. John feared that it would be long before I might do so, for heaven

and earth would be moved to secure my capture, and he highly commended the wisdom of my host in disallowing me to leave my retreat. He thought it more than likely Boswell might have spied on me and guessed my destination.

"If so," he added, "the fellow will keep the knowledge to himself, until he gives up hope of taking you single-handed. He will endeavour so to do, rather than share the reward with others. Remember the offer is equal for taking you 'dead or alive!' So prithee be on thy guard, my friend."

Some of the earl's officers had visited Belshaw, but could not learn anything from the women, and John's cousin knew nothing.

John had called at the Crowle vicarage to assure my aunt I was in no present danger. There he heard news of Dick Portington, who had been to London and the Bath with Ryther and his daughter for some time; and it was commonly reported that Dick and Mistress Ryther were to be married at Christmas. So it was not probable that Dick and I should be on the old terms of close friendship any more.

We had some talk of the defeat of King Christian at Lutter, of which John had heard in Hull, and of the purpose of King Charles to enroll a body of volunteers to go to the assistance of his uncle and the cause of Protestantism.

"If we could but smuggle you out of the Isle," said John, "here might be an opening for you."

But of smuggling me away there seemed to be

no chance just now. After we had agreed on a plan of communication, John returned, and I resigned myself with such composure as I could muster to a sojourn at Lindholme for an uncertain time, which I must pass as best I could.

There was certainly plenty of such diversion as fowling affords, for at that time the birds were more abundant all over the Isle than in these days, and round about Lindholme more numerous than anywhere else, but difficult to come by on account of the rottenness of the bog and the height and thickness of the reeds. I have seen the surface of the ground for a couple of roods blackened with brent geese, when it was impossible to get within shot of them, and though flocks of hoopers (which some call whistling swans) came to feed every evening of my stay at Lindholme, returning to the seashore every morning, the only manner of getting a shot was to find some spot beneath their line of flight, where the ground would bear a man's weight, and there was cover in which to hide, and such spots were bad to find. We often heard the dunbirds (redheads, our marshmen call them) working all night within half a mile of us, and might have had good sport, if we could have got near to them in the morning twilight, when they head up together ready to fly to their day quarters; but that could only be done when rain had fallen so heavily that there was water sufficient to float a punt. So, though game was plentiful, there was occasion for judgment and skill in taking it, which

gave zest to our diversion, and the hermit and I spent most of the day in the open air, sometimes venturing on to the bog where he had not dared to go alone. Of an evening we sat over the fire awhile, he smoking his pipe and often drinking rather freely of brandy-wine, until such time as he thought good to climb into his hammock in the inmost room. At such times he talked very strangely, when he had loosened his tongue by drinking, and one of his themes was the madness of the world.

"'Tis a mad world, Mr. Vavasour, he would say, "consider it how you will. The desires and pursuits of ninety-nine out of a hundred men are so lunatical that we should die of laughing at one another, if we were not all mad together. One man sets his heart on acquiring twenty thousand pounds; he might just as wisely toil to accumulate twenty thousand red pebbles. Nay, that would be better, for he might heap up his pebbles without lying and cheating or harm to any of his neighbours. He gets no more good of his pounds than if they were pebbles, unless you can reckon the envy of his equally foolish associates as an advantage. He eats no better than I, sleeps no better, has no enjoyment which is not mine, and at last he dies, leaving his pebbles—his pounds I mean—to be the subject of heart-burning and wrangling among his heirs. Another idiot is bent on learning, which means that he loads his memory with a pack of stuff which is mainly false, and none of it

of use for any conceivable purpose. He reads what was written ages ago by the flatterers of some man called great, or by those who took pleasure in defaming him, or by those who were too cross and stupid to understand him. He reads of prodigies which never happened, of monsters which never existed, speeches which were never spoken, accounts of battles derived from persons who did not see them. He is crammed with idle tales and fond inventions; and other men, addicted to the same follies, give him a cloak and a cap, and call him doctor. And the most outrageous part of the farce is that the men who are appointed to teach poor folk to be chaste and just and kind, are required to be well versed in tales about gods and goddesses, which are so full of impurity and wickedness that no one would dare to English them for the reading of the common people. 'Tis a mad world."

Thus he would go on by the hour when the humour took him, and had it all his own way with me, for if I put in a word of objection, he overwhelmed me with a torrent of eloquence, or nimbly skipped off in some new direction.

One evening he strove to show me that Daft Jack was the sanest man in our part of the world.

"He is free from the madness of gathering money, being content to live as the birds and beasts do, without care for the morrow, as your religion bids you to live. He has no wish to be talked about after he is dead and buried, which madmen

dignify by calling it desire for fame. He has not racked his brain over books filled with lies and vain imaginations; but he knows the whereabout and the ways of fish and fowl, and how to find and use every herb and root which is good for food. His bit of orchard is well kept and tilled, and if you were to put him down in any quarter of the world, he would know how to get a living. And to crown all, he accepts without murmur the name of fool, which madmen give him."

"Not quite so," I interjected, remembering what the high and mighty Tunstall had to suffer through calling him so. This led to my telling the story, which provoked the hermit to one of his queer fits of laughter—laughter which did not pucker his face or show in his eyes, but came from his throat like the noise from a gun.

A few days later, my host spoke freely of his own history, telling me that his relatives had obtained possession of his estate on the allegation of his lunacy, and had attempted to shut him up in a bedlam. He had contrived to effect his escape with money, which sufficed to stock his farm in a small way; but he had long lived in fear of being seized and carried off to a madhouse. Now he had lost the fear, having been unmolested for some years. So, at least, he said; but from the vehemence with which he spoke of the matter, and from some of his actions, I doubted whether his assurance was as perfect as he affirmed. He sometimes made the round of the island at night, gun

in hand, preferring to go alone, and on his return, he looked with great carefulness to the bolts and bars of the door. That he should have such fastenings in a place so remote and inaccessible had appeared strange to me, but at first I set it down to force of habit.

Of the other denizens of the islet I saw little. The man was a sturdy fellow of a hangdog look, and spoke mumblingly, so that I could not make out one word in a dozen. The woman was of appalling ugliness, and so unwomanlike as never to speak except when spoken to, and not always then. Their son combined the qualities of sire and dam, a lout so clumsy and hideous that he seemed hardly human, but of immense bodily strength. All three gave a sullen obedience to the hermit, often making surly answer to his commands, but appearing to go in dread of him. It was evident they looked on me with disfavour, though why I had no guess, and I did not give myself the trouble to learn.

A month lagged slowly by, Bland and I spending our days mainly in shooting, and the short time between supper and bed in converse, or, rather, in his talking and my listening. Toward the end of the month he began to drink deeply, and to talk more wildly than ever. One evening, after I had listened with my utmost patience to his railing on this and that folly of mankind, or what he accounted such, he turned to the subject of love, which he reckoned the veriest madness of

all, which had been artfully turned by priests and lawmakers for their profit, and the subjection of their fellows to the institution of marriage; of which he said many vile and abominable things, confounding the divine affection of the soul with the instinct that leads animals to pair, until my gorge rose, and I cried—

"Hold! I will not sit to listen to this foul raving."

Such fury seized him at my words as I hope I may never see again. He sprang to his feet, his eyes glaring, his every limb trembling.

"Dare you call me madman?" he shouted. "You whom I have sheltered and fed, lumpish mooncalf, unlettered bumpkin! Out of my house, or I will make an end of you!"

As he turned, foaming at the mouth with rage, to reach his gun, I deemed it best to put the door between us.

At length I saw that the hermit was a madman, whose mind was possessed with the belief that he alone, of all human creatures, had his right wits and the rest of the world was mad. Some touch of his infirmity I have seen in others, but nothing so colossal.

'Twas a keen and frosty night, the beginning of a spell of bitter weather, as I surmised from the silence on the fen. Many birds, which stay on the marshes till Christmas, or later in mild winters, I had seen in flight during the last two or three days, and many more must have taken their departure,

for there to be such extraordinary quietude. On the morrow it would be easy to return to Belshaw over the frozen bog, but it would be foolhardy to venture now, for the thin crescent of the moon was low down in the west. I did not choose to rouse Bland's servants to ask for anything, so I paced up and down the hill ten or twelve times to warm myself, and then lay down in the barn, pulling hay over me, and waited for the dawn. When it came, I tried Bland's door, and found it unbarred, so I stepped lightly in, and gathered my belongings together without arousing him, or at least without his giving any sign of being disturbed. I had no occasion to enter the inner room, all my property being in the outer one. So I turned my back on Lindholme, uncertain where to hide my head now, but intending to take counsel with John and Bess.

When I reached Belshaw, soon after seven o'clock, for one could go swiftly over the ground made firm by the frost, the sight of Dame Drury's face told me bad news, for her eyes were swollen with weeping. She broke into such crying and sobbing, when I asked what was amiss, that she could scarcely tell me her doleful tidings. Late last night a troop of musketeers had surrounded the house, and some of them had entered and laid hold of Bess, whom they had strapped behind one of their number, and carried her off to Castle Mulgrave. They had made no secret of what was intended to be done with her; she was to be

"questioned" of her knowledge of my doings and present abode, as the fellows had plainly said with many a coarse and brutal jest. While I sat with my head in my hand, trying to think of what I should do, John came to me.

"Nay, be not so utterly downcast, my friend," said he. "This is none of Boswell's doing. Not even he can be such an unnatural fiend as to give up his daughter to the torment of the rack, or even to look on while she is tortured. He must have influence enough with the earl to save her from that."

"You take too much for granted," I replied, "We don't know that Boswell is in the earl's service, or that his utmost effort on her behalf would have a feather's weight. I can trust to no such peradventure as that."

"But you can do nothing," urged John. "If Boswell's standing with the earl avails nothing, what is yours? What can you offer to induce him to spare poor Bess?"

"Thanks, ten thousand thanks for the enlightening word," I cried, grasping John's hand. "I will offer him Frank Vavasour."

"But Frank Vavasour is not his own to offer. There are the rights of a dear lady far away to be considered."

"If I know her, John, she would not think her property in me worth a bad farthing, if I left Bess to the torture, if I did not do all that may be done to save her. Give order for Trueboy to be saddled

and another horse. Come with me to Castle Mulgrave; we can talk as we ride."

Dame Drury brought us something to eat and drink, while the horses were saddled, and in a few minutes we were on our way. As we rode, I told John how I had been driven from Lindholme; and we spoke of what was to be the manner of procedure at the castle. My first thought had been that John might deal with the earl, promising to give me up on condition of the deliverance of Bess; but he had a word to say which changed the face of affairs.

"A week after you took refuge in Lindholme, I thought we had been foolish not to pay better attention to the proclamation issued by the earl. Here it is. You see the description is of your appearance as it was before that villain meddled with your face, and we might have shipped you off under the eyes of men who had that description in their hands. I should have ventured across to Lindholme to speak with you on this; but feared I might lead the way for your pursuers, and waited also for the slackening of the hue-and-cry."

"Thank Heaven for your delay. This may mean the salvation of Bess, and better terms for me than I had any hope of when we set off. The earl and those nearest him may know nothing of my mutilation. I will take the chance to negotiate with the earl myself. I know him as you do not. If my scheme prove good, Bess will be handed over to you within an hour. What will

come of me, remains to be seen. You will let every one know where I am, and stir up all the help for me that can be found, I know right well. Squire Stovin, Parson Graves, Mr. Ulceby, and whomsoever else you can think of. Here we are! Take Trueboy. I must not ride up to the castle, but enter as a marshman should."

We both alighted and gripped hands.

"God give you good luck!" said John. "I dare not gainsay you, my friend, for you are doing what I hope I should do, if I were in your place. Be sure I will not rest until all is done that may be done, to snatch you from beneath the old lion's paw."

Chapter XXII

THE earl maintained a great retinue and a kind of military state, and the courtyard of his castle was alive this morning with pages and serving-men in his livery, exercising or bustling about on various errands; but I had little fear any of them would know me, for not many of the gentlemen of the isle chose to enter his train, nor did the common folk relish the restraint and weariness of his service, so the bulk of those who wore his colours were enlisted from distant parts of the country. My confidence was justified, no one accosting me or taking any heed of me. I told the porter, using the style of speaking which matched my apparel, I had tidings for the earl of the first importance. He conducted me to a little room, where he bade me wait the leisure of the steward and left me. The door of the room stood ajar, and I heard voices in a room opposite, one of them being Boswell's. Needless to say I listened with both ears.

"Oh, sir, persuade the earl to hear me for one moment—I beg for only a moment."

"You do but waste my time. I tell you the earl will not see you."

"Then for pity's sake, good Master Nicholas,

go you to him and let him know Vavasour is found. He is in hiding at Lindholme. If the earl will order a dozen men to go with me, the murderer shall be in his hands this afternoon. The frost makes the bog like stone."

"His lordship shall hear this, certainly."

"And beg him to spare my girl until I bring Vavasour. Entreat him to be so far merciful, Master Nicholas!"

"I will let you know his lordship's pleasure," answered the steward, and crossed the passage to the room in which I awaited him.

"And what is your business, my man?" he asked loftily, toying with his gold chain of office.

"To give up the man that killed my Lord Sheffield and get my reward," I answered in rustic fashion.

"And where is the man?"

"By your leave, that is for his lordship's ear."

"Art insolent, knave? May'st take thyself off. Thy information is late. We happen to have one of the murderer's familiars on the rack."

"Who knows no more than you do."

"Which chances to be all that is needful. In a few hours we shall have the villain."

"If I give him up to you, not else. 'Tis a fool's errand to go to Lindholme to look for him."

"Ah! how know you that? To be sure the doors were open. There's a big reward offered

for the apprehension of the rascal, and a percentage is due——"

"You shall have one pound out of every ten," I broke in. While this man delayed and chaffered, poor Bess might be suffering horribly.

"'Tis a bargain; follow me," he said.

He led me to the chamber in the tower which, I knew, was used for "questioning" accused prisoners and stubborn witnesses. Bidding me remain outside, he entered, closing the door behind him, and in a minute reappeared and beckoned me in. The old earl sat wrapped in furs on one side of the hexagonal room. Behind him stood a man whom I took to be a physician; in the corner, to the earl's right hand, stood another with writing materials on a small, high table in front of him.

The rack lay at his lordship's feet, two stout fellows at each end of it, with long staves in their hands, the ends inserted in the sockets of the poles on which the cords are wound. Bess was stretched by the wrists and ankles, so that no part of her body touched the floor, with nothing to cover her save a short smock. On the instant she knew me, and a hot flush came into her face; and I turned away my eyes unable to bear the sight of her pain and shame. For a moment the same red haze came over my sight as I saw when Staniforth fell by my side at Thorne, and a mad humour of smiting them that did the cruelty seized me. But I was brought to my senses by the thin, piping voice of the old nobleman—

"My steward informs me you pretend to know where Vavasour is to be found."

How hard he strove to control himself! But his voice shook with eager desire.

"You shall have him safe within the hour, my lord, if you will give me the reward I ask."

"You speak positively, fellow, of the capture of a man who has evaded all pursuits for more than a month."

"He has not the ghost of a chance to escape me, my lord. You shall have him as fast as a bird in a cage."

"But you want a larger reward than a hundred pounds? How much?"

"I don't want a penny, my lord. I ask for what will cost you nothing."

"Shalt have it, whatever it is, only make thy word good," said he, leaning forward, his eyes fixed on me.

"The boon I ask is liberty for the prisoner on the rack."

"Release her," he ordered. "And now where is Vavasour."

"Here, my lord—I am he."

The earl rose from his seat, and sank back again, staring. The clerk let fall the pen with which he had been making notes. The four men who had lowered Bess to the floor gazed on me open-mouthed.

She was the first to speak. "Your lordship, this is a poor fellow who has had his head turned by

trouble, and his craze is to think himself Frank Vavasour; but his true name is Jack Unwin. He has J. U. tattooed on his chest."

At a sign from the earl, the men laid hands on me and bared my breast, while the old nobleman sat choking with rage and mortification, glaring from me to Bess, and from Bess to me.

"My lord," said I, "you have given me your word to let the prisoner go free. Her subsequent lie, meant to shield and save me, will not hinder the fulfilment of your promise. As for these marks on my breast, and these scars on my face, the man who inflicted them is now in your steward's room, and may be compelled to say why he made them, if that be your pleasure. But of a surety I am Frank Vavasour, at one time your son Edmund's boyish friend, and familiar with everything in this castle."

The earl rubbed his hands. "Vavasour, assuredly," he said. "The matchless impudence proves the breed."

He turned to Bess, who had taken her stand in the utmost shadow she could find.

"Get you gone, jade, before I order you a whipping."

Then he gave instructions to the steward and the scribe.

"Nicholas, bring hither the fellow Boswell, saying nothing of what has passed here. Fetch your book of depositions and informations, Pennington."

Bess looked at me reproachfully as she went

out, and I answered her with a smile, glad to note she walked not amiss for one who had been stretched on the rack. For the minute or two, while the steward and clerk were absent, the earl leaned back in his chair, gloating on me like a cat on the mouse she has struck. When they returned, he said—

"Boswell, look at this fellow, who says he is Frank Vavasour. What sayest thou?"

For half a second the gipsy hesitated.

"Quick, man, speak the truth, or——" and his lordship finished his sentence by a motion of the hand toward the rack.

"It is the man, your lordship."

"Pennington, read me the description of Vavasour given in our proclamation."

When the clerk had done so, the earl turned on Boswell.

"How comes it that you, who were in my son's service, and knew this man, did not inform Pennington of the errors in this document? There is not a word here of scars on the face or marking on the breast. What is the meaning of this? Subornation?"

"No, my lord. I did not know of the scars; or if I did, I had forgotten them."

It was amazing to me that the ready, crafty villain should bungle and blunder so.

"Forgotten your own handiwork?" asked the earl, in the silkiest tone.

Boswell was so confounded by the question that

he had nothing to say. Before he could recover himself, the earl cried—

"Into the rack with him."

In little more than the twinkling of an eye, the men had pounced on him, stripped him to his shirt, and tied his feet and hands. It made one shudder to think what long practice had made them so dexterous at the work. They plied their levers, until their victim was stretched, and one heard wrists and ankle-joints crack sickeningly.

At a downward wave of the earl's hand they stayed.

"Why did you not report to my secretary the errors in this description?"

"The proclamation had been posted far and wide before I knew of it; and I was afraid to mention the marks, lest I should be further questioned concerning them, and I thought to take Vavasour myself."

Again the earl's hand moved, and the levers moved.

"Mercy, my lord, mercy!" groaned the gipsy.

"You kept the knowledge to yourself, at the imminent risk of the murderer's escape, in hope to make sure of the reward."

"Yes."

"When and where did you inflict the wounds?"

"Last August in Melwood Priory. Mercy, my lord."

"To what end?"

"Because my Lord Sheffield desired to have

him sent to the plantations under the name and likeness of one Jim Ulceby."

The earl sat silent for what seemed a long time, Boswell moaning feebly the while. Then again the hand waved, the levers moved, and Boswell shrieked in agony.

"My son gave you order to mutilate Vavasour?"

"Yes; I did all by his lordship's command."

"Take both prisoners away and bestow them safely in separate dungeons," said his lordship; "and bring me a cordial, Nicholas."

The secretary motioned to me to follow him, and two of the men came behind me. Pennington led the way down the winding stairs to a dungeon lighted only by a slit in the wall, and containing no other furniture than a stone table.

"'Tis more than a trifle cold here, Master Pennington," said I. "Some straw for one's feet, and a wrap for one's body, would be welcome."

"I will take my lord's pleasure on the matter," replied the secretary, who, to do him justice, had little of the Jack-in-office in his manners.

"Pray remind him, Master Pennington, that I have saved him a hundred pounds, which deserves acknowledgment."

I thought I saw a faint smile on the man's face as he answered—

"You take things easily for a prisoner charged with the murder of the heir to an earldom."

"Charged with nothing as yet, and well prepared

to clear myself from any such accusation, when I am brought into court of law."

"The President of the Council has large discretion and plenary powers; nay, has in a sense the royal prerogative," rejoined the secretary.

"Give you my word, I never heard that the King had prerogative to hang a man without trial."

Master Pennington made me no answer to this, but withdrew, barring and locking the door on the outside.

I know not how it was that I rose to a jesting temper, now that the worst had come to me. Perhaps that was the reason, or it may be my pleasure in saving Bess from further torment raised me to a jocund spirit, or the look I saw on the old earl's face, when he heard Boswell's confession, put heart into me, but truly I was in better cheer than I had been for many a day. I knew well enough the scope of the earl's authority, and how he might override the law in his black vengeance, but I was nowise daunted. I could have sung a ballad, if my lips had not trembled with the cold.

About noon, Master Pennington entered my dungeon, accompanied by two serving-men, who brought food and wine, and a truss of straw and blankets.

"His lordship is liberal," said I.

"You owe your provision to the former steward," answered the secretary. "He still has authority, though past service, and charged me to say that

his rheumatic joints forbid his coming to you, but whatever a bedridden old man can do shall be done on your behalf."

"The kind old man! I pray you give him thanks for me. I owe Master Wintringham gratitude for many a favour in bygone days."

Three times a day, good food was brought to my dungeon by a serving-man, but the half-friendly secretary did not come again for days, and the servitors could not, or would not, tell me news of any kind. My condition, so far as bodily comfort went, would have been tolerable, but for lack of warmth. I paced the floor, slapped my shoulders, held boxing bouts with an invisible adversary, jumped till I had no breath left, all to get me some heat into my body, able to think of nothing but that I was like to die of cold. Of nights I wrapped the coverlets tightly round me, and burrowed in the straw, but could not sleep for shivering. After a while, the rigorous weather abated somewhat, or I became hardened to it, though it was November. But I was now to suffer no less by thinking. My gamesome temper had soon left me, and I have no words for a description of the heaviness which followed.

I knew it was in vain to revolve thoughts of escape, for watch was kept continually, and I had no means to enlarge the long, narrow slit in the wall that served to give me light and air. I could do nothing but sit wondering and waiting miserably, for such was the strange commotion in my

brain, that my prayers for deliverance brought me no hope or consolation.

So I passed a fortnight, and then the secretary appeared again to summon me to the presence of the earl, who lay on a couch, looking worn and feeble, his hands trembling as if he had no control of them. Behind his couch stood a youth, whom at first I did not know, not having seen him since he was a child. He was the earl's heir now, Lord Butterwick by proper title, but in our country usage, Lord Sheffield. He inclined his head to me, saying, "Be seated, Mr. Vavasour."

What this courtesy might portend I could but wonder. The secretary sat down at a desk, and I in front of the couch, half stifled by the heat of the chamber.

"My father wishes you to hear a sworn deposition read, and afterwards to give your own account of the affair," said the young man.

Pennington took up a paper and read. It described the doings at Thorne, when my friend Staniforth was killed, but falsely. According to the deponent, the business began by my inciting my comrades to attack the earl's men, myself leading the assault. Staniforth's death was recorded as happening in the thick of the fray. When the secretary had finished the reading, I told the story from beginning to end, as I have before told it in this book.

Lord Butterwick asked me for the names of eyewitnesses, which I gave.

Another deposition was to the effect that I had been seen to go to the cottage where Daft Jack (John Temperton he was named in the document) lived; that the deponent had followed me, and heard me use language tending to encourage him in a design on the life of the King's Commissioner. What I had said to Jack, after the event, was cunningly perverted, and reported as having been said before the scene at the White Hart. Again, I gave the true account. All the time the earl said not a word, but kept his eyes steadily on me. Now he turned to his son, saying something in a voice too low for me to hear, and Lord Butterwick replied also in a low tone, but I caught the words, "able to bear more." After they had spoken together in this manner, Lord Butterwick turned again to me.

"The earl bids me request your report of the enmity between you and my late brother."

"My lord, it began long ago in this house, as I think you will remember, but it came to no more than flouts on his part and scornful answers on mine, when we chanced to meet, which was not often. But of late it has been quickened because we were rivals for the love of Mistress Goel, whom you know. Once I smote him on the face, because he slandered her, but I have done no other ill to him, save a blow with the fist, defending Mistress Goel from his lust and violence. God knows I had no intent to kill him, as may be evident from my smiting with the fist, when I had weapons at

my side and in my belt, nor do I believe the blow would have given him his death, had he not turned aside, so that he took it below the ear. At the time I thought him no worse than insensible for the moment."

The earl's face grew dark while I spoke, and when I had ended, he said—

"The *peine forte et dure* might extort a less plausible story."

"The prisoner to be laid on his back, and to have iron placed on his breast, as much as he can bear and more, and to be fed with bad bread and stagnant water on alternate days until he testifies truly or dies," murmured the secretary, as if he read from a book.

I saw no reason why I should answer, and there was a long silence. At last the the earl asked—

"Who were present when you struck the blow?"

"Doctor Goel, his daughter, and their serving-maid."

"Where are they now?"

"As I hope and believe, in their own country."

"They fled at your suggestion?"

"Not because they feared to bear testimony for me, but having too much reason to dread persecution themselves."

The earl's countenance darkened yet more, and his hands shook violently. His son bent over his couch, pleading with him, as I judged by the tone, but did not hear what was said.

"Take away the prisoner," at length the earl

commanded; and the secretary opened the door, and called two men to conduct me again to my dungeon. There I remained yet another fortnight; but since I have dilated upon my suffering there more than enough, I will say nothing further thereon.

On the last day of November, hearing a dolorous sound of trumpeting, I climbed on the stone table, from which I could see through my window a little piece of the road. Across this small space passed a number of the earl's serving-men, two by two, in long black cloaks, with black bands streaming from their hats; then two trumpeters in black, making mournful music; then an esquire, mounted, and bearing a pennon or guidon, one half black and the other white. Next came two grooms on foot, leading a horse covered with black caparison, the reins being held by a gentleman on horseback. A number of gentlemen in mourning followed two by two, and then two trumpeters. Was Earl Mulgrave dead and this his funeral, I asked myself, with a thrill of hope, God forgive me. The next comer determined me—a rider, carrying a black banner with the Mulgrave arms silver-embroidered. After other gentlemen in mourning, one passed bearing a black staff with a pair of spurs on the end of it. Then came another, who bore the gauntlets in the same manner, and one carrying sword and target. Shortly appeared a gentleman carrying the coronet on a cushion, with two others, one walking on either side of him. After them,

came one who bore the mantle, helmet, wreath, and crest. Then a number of clergymen, two by two, and one who walked alone. And now the pall-covered coffin was carried shoulder-high, pall-bearers on each side, attended by six banners, three on the one side, and three on the other. Another horse was led behind his master's coffin, and the coach of state followed, drawn by four horses, all draped in mourning fashion. Other coaches rolled by, and after them a long train of gentlemen on horseback passed slowly, and I sank down to wonder what the old nobleman's death might mean to me. Within twenty-four hours I knew. Master Pennington came to my dungeon, and, briefly informing me of the late earl's death, bade me go with him to meet the new lord of Mulgrave Castle.

He dismissed the secretary, and as soon as the door had closed behind him, said—

"Mr. Vavasour, I am not President of Council, or in any kind of judgeship, and therefore have no right to detain you prisoner in my house; but as the brother of the man you killed, it is my duty to hand you over to the rightful authorities, that you may stand your trial for the deed."

I bowed my head.

"I am advised there is no evidence against you but your own confession," continued the young earl.

What a fool I had been to make it, was my first thought.

"But that confession bore so much the seal of truth, and all you said has been so strongly confirmed by the avowal of the gipsy Boswell, and by more credible witnesses, that, considering what you have endured from us, and, to be frank with you, considering how little creditable to the house of Mulgrave it might be to publish what you have suffered at our hands, although you and I may not be friends, I incline to think we might be generous enemies."

I had no answer ready to his surprising speech, which he had either taken some pains to prepare, or had had prepared for him. He went on—

"Will you give me your word, Mr. Vavasour, to take your trial, if I call upon you to do so?"

"Assuredly, my lord," I replied.

"Then you are at liberty to go whither you will. But worthy Master Wintringham desires much to see you before you leave the castle."

Chapter XXIII

HOW good it was to be free! How beautiful the country was! Never before had I seen how graceful is the tracery of bare boughs against the sky, or what loveliness there is in a snowdrift, or what grandeur in a wide white prospect. To swing my legs, and to hear the crunch of the snow under my feet, were pure delight, and I turned off the causey again and again, to try the strength of the ice on the marsh, like an urchin just let out of school. In sheer wantonness, I threw a snowball at a solemn heron, who stood in a place where the ice had been broken, and laughed to see him start and flap sulkily away. I shouted greeting to every reed-cutter I passed within hail, and the men looked up from their work and stared as at some wandering madman.

By the time I reached Belshaw I had sobered down a little, but sang lustily as I walked, and the noise brought John out in no small amazement.

"What hallooing and what stir is this to-day?" he cried, as he came to meet me. "Why, man alive! what is the meaning of this? Here are we scribbling petitions to this and that great one of the earth, sending post-haste to Lincoln and London, and Lord knows where, and making such pitiful dole over the pining captive as never was,

and behold him as merry as a cricket! Hast broken prison? Burned down Castle Mulgrave? The answer, quick, before I burst with curiosity."

By this he had both my hands in his.

"'Tis very simple; the young earl gave me my liberty."

"And not too much for him to give thee for his earldom; though whether he be wise to pay his debt so quickly—well, that's no matter to us."

"What is your news?" I asked.

"That you shall hear over a turf fire with a cup of mulled claret at your lips or in your fist; not here, where we are like to freeze."

Within an hour I had heard of my friends and their efforts on my behalf, while I had been in durance, which I need not here set down.

John dashed my spirits no little by his account of Mr. Ulceby's affairs, who had trusted overmuch in the honour and prosperity of one with whom he had large dealings, now become bankrupt, so that there was fear his own business might be ruined.

"Whatever be the upshot," said he, "there can be no present question of your entering his service, and, so far as you are concerned, I am content it should be so. As well cage a swallow, or try to keep salmon in a pond, as to pen you in a counting-house. We must cast about for some likelier means to push your fortune. What say you to offering our swords to the King of Sweden in his war against the Poles? I have acquaintance with

some of his officers, who would be more than willing to take two such soldiers of fortune."

"You would go?"

"That would I gladly. And we are comrades, not to be parted, until you are Benedick, the married man."

I took a little time to think before I gave answer, for I doubted whether my small store of valuables would sell for as much as would provide a soldier's outfit and pay my passage to Sweden. Then I had my horse's keep to think on. He had been stabled, fed, and exercised at Belshaw this long time.

"That cloudy brow says you lack the wherewithal, I suppose. Surely, I need not say 'my purse, my person, my extremest means, lie open to your occasions.' And while I have lain here, my money has grown to a heap that will take some spending. 'Tis a kindness to help me, for a sort of miserliness has been creeping on me of late."

I laughed at this, but John would have it that 'twas no laughing matter.

"As soon as a heap of gold is big enough to hide one of Satan's imps, there he lurks like a wood-louse under a stone, and whenever you go to take a piece, he whispers, 'Don't minish the pile, but make it bigger; dear brother devil, do.' And he can find fifty diabolical reasons why you should."

After more talk of this kind, we fell into serious debate, of which the conclusion was, that we should enter the Swedish army with what speed

we might; so, leaving John to do what was necessary, I rode to Crowle, rejoicing to be again astride my gallant Trueboy, who gave every sign a horse can make that he was as well pleased as I.

How my good aunt received me, I lack words to describe. She threw herself into my arms, clasped my neck, and then held me off to look at my face, and wept and laughed and wept again, and in spite of her sobbing and choking, spoke faster than I ever heard her do before or since.

"My poor, dear Frank, to think you were alive and well, or at least alive, while I was breaking my heart over your death! And the money I wasted in mourning! Not that I grudge it, now you are safe and sound. And Graves spoke so beautifully of you in his sermon, so much more hopeful you were in heaven than one expected from him, that I cried like a child in church! And all the time you were in the hands of tormentors! And of all men in the world, that addle-pated Canon Fell must be here, when you came, seeking a friend in need! Never again does the man cross the threshold of my house. And you were thrust into a vile prison among thieves and murderers. Well, we must be thankful you didn't die of gaol-fever. 'Reckon every misery you miss as a mercy,' Graves often says; but you have missed few, I am sure. How I want to see the dear, good man who delivered you! And now, they tell me, he is likely to come to want; truly the ways of Providence are strange, and not all the sermons in the world will

convince me they are not. And Lord Sheffield had a hand in the mangling of your dear face. I shall never believe in man again. But, Frank, how did you escape? I had clean forgotten in the joy of seeing you. How have you got out of Castle Mulgrave? Perhaps they are pursuing you, while I am gabbling like the foolish old woman I am."

"Not so, auntie. The young earl set me free this morning."

"God bless him! This morning, did you say? And now it is near supper-time. You must be starving."

The kind soul did not stay to listen to my protestations, but flew to her kitchen to hasten supper.

Over that meal, which we had by our two selves, the vicar being away at a meeting of clergymen, my aunt told me the contents of a letter which she had received from my father, or part of the contents. The letter she did not show me. He wrote from Amsterdam, whence he purposed to go to Venice and the East, saying that a Dutch gentleman, with whom he had made acquaintance, and who had done him service with the Stadtholder, turned out to be Doctor Goel, and the doctor had informed him I was still alive, and of all he knew concerning my affairs, which did not go further than that I was in hiding. My father took shame to himself for having been so easily deceived as to my death, and wrote remorsefully of my mischance and suffering, and bade my aunt convey to me his forgiveness.

I thought his letter somewhat less than fatherly, even in my aunt's account, but I said nothing. She read my silence.

"Bear in mind, Frank, that your father has been hurt in the tenderest part of him—his pride. All his life he has been looked up to as the chief man in the Isle, barring the nobility, and he was confident of carrying all before him against Vermuijden and the King himself. And he has utterly failed. To such a man as he is, that is tenfold more bitter than death. Doubtless, he thinks he would have won the day, if you had fallen in with his plans."

My aunt desired a full relation of my adventures, and asked many questions, so that it was late when I retired. (She sat up to wait the coming of her husband.) I found a cheerful fire in my bedroom, and some hot elderberry wine ready for my drinking, which was better stuff than some I have paid for as wine of Oporto. And then I crept to bed, a feather-bed, with abundant covering, such as I had not lain in for many weeks, and fell asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.

My aunt made great outcry against my going soldiering in foreign service. She had a score of plans for me which she thought better than pursuit of fortune through cannon smoke and the perils of war; and, in her anxiety to keep me at home, declared I might become barrister, or physician, or clerk in holy orders; and when I showed some wonder at her new estimation of my talents, she

was constrained to defend her opinion by disparaging the parts and learning necessary to lawyers, doctors, and divines. She dared to say one might become a sergeant by dint of brazen face and ready tongue; or win repute as doctor by saying little, and shaking one's head wisely. And she even made bold to say that, in her judgment, the less Greek and Latin a clergyman had the better. To such arguments I could find no answer, save that I knew I was fit for nothing but to be a plain country gentleman, and since that was denied me, to turn soldier.

We had plenty of leisure to discuss the matter, for it was not until after Christmas that John heard from his Swedish friends, assuring us of welcome. In the meantime I had little to do. I wrote a long letter to my love, who replied, agreeing with me, though sorrowfully, that soldiership was my best occupation.

Mr. Ulceby's affairs were in so much confusion, as he told me, when I paid him a visit, that he knew not in the least how they would turn out; and all I could understand, from the account he gave me, was that two or three thousand pounds would straighten them. It was great comfort to him that no man doubted his integrity, or even much impugned his prudence; for many other merchants had fully trusted the man by whom he had been deceived. John Drury had given him no small consolation, finding where and when his son had died; learning from the labourer's wife,

who nursed him, that the young man had spoken of his sin against his father with shame and penitence.

"So, I confidently trust," said the good old man, "that the Father in heaven is not less forgiving than the unworthy one on earth."

In this time of waiting, I took opportunity to see my friend Dick Portington, and found him at first somewhat dry and cold; but he came by degrees to a more cordial manner, and at last let me into the secret of the change which had come over him.

"Hast no grudge against me, Frank?"

"What grudge can I have against thee? It passes my wit to guess."

"For one thing, I am to be master of thy inheritance."

"It comes to thee, I suppose, as the dower of thy bride? What offence can that be to me?"

"Thou might'st have had it, if the lady could have been brought to favour thy suit. Can'st be friendly with thy rival?"

"Can give thee joy of thy success, man, and dance at thy wedding, if I am invited, and not too far away to come to it."

After that we were on the old terms for the while, and had good sport together among the half-duck and mussel-duck which abounded at Tudworth. Dick did me the kindness to take Luke into his service for the time, who had come to me at the vicarage in hope to be employed; but there

was no work for him, and I had no right to burden the vicar with another idler's maintenance.

When, at length, John received letters from Sweden, I went to take farewell of Bess, who remained with her father and grandmother in a cottage on the east of Belton; the rest of the tribe having gone, as was their custom at this time of the year, to Nottingham. When I entered the house, the grandmother, looking fearfully old and wrinkled, was cowering over the fire, and Bess sat opposite her, doing some kind of sewing. The aged crone turned her head, and, seeing me, began to laugh, jabbering in her gipsy tongue, as if to bid me welcome, and would have risen, but Bess gently forced her back into her seat. This mightily incensed the old woman, and she chattered and screamed in anger at Bess, beckoning me to come nearer. As I stood, unable to comprehend all this, Bess said to me—

"Go outside, and I will come to you when she is pacified."

In a little time she appeared.

"Poor Grannie takes you for her husband, who left her in her youth, and went back to his own people."

"His own people?" I echoed.

"He was a gentile who joined our tribe and took the name of Boswell. What his name was, or whence he came, I know not, for Grannie had grown feeble in mind with age, before I heard anything of the story; but my father has brooded

on it for years, and persuaded himself that his father was some one of note and wealth, and the marriage lawful, and he himself the heir by right to an estate. He has some papers and trinkets by which he sets great store, as proofs of his notion. 'Tis his belief that if he had money wherewith to fee lawyers, he might oust some man now in wrongful possession of his place and property."

"Is this all you know, Bess?"

"All, except Grannie's name for her faithless husband. She calls him 'Harry.'"

While Bess was speaking I recalled to mind a tale of my grandfather Henry Vavasour, which Mr. Butharwick had told me; how he had left home to wander with the gipsies for some years, a very mad-cap, full of pranks, and returned to his proper station on his father's death. Could it be that the gipsy-girl and I were cousins, and she, perchance, by right the mistress of Temple Belwood? I knew that my likeness to my grandfather had struck some who knew him. Was the old woman not altogether crazy, but only forgetful of the lapse of time?

"Suppose your father's fancy should be true, Bess, and you the heiress of some rich man, or noble of the land."

Bess laughed. "I give no credent ear to the dream; and if it should come true, the gentile might remain undisturbed for me. I love the tent —even now I choke for air inside cottage walls."

"But a mansion, Bess, a house like Temple, say."

"So much the more a prison, room within room, and the life a slavery to bells and striking clocks, a dull round of doing the same thing at the same hour. I suffocate to think of it."

"There are comforts and conveniencies, Bess."

"You think them so because custom makes them necessary. You shut yourselves in a stuffy chamber and heap blankets and sheets on you, for it is bedtime, whether you are drowsy or not; whether the night be dull, or more splendid than the day. To rest, when you are weary, on sweet smelling heather, lulled by the still noises of the night, the wind in the grass, the cries of night-birds, the faint sound of moving water—is not to your liking. How should it be, when you have not tried it? Or to roam, the night through, under a sky shining with stars, when the trees have donned their robes of lovely mist, and the creatures which are afraid of man are abroad, the beasts and birds and creeping and flying things that love the dark, hold stillness of the night; what do you know of this, you who are never out in the dusk, except to kill, or to hurry from this house to that?"

"Not so delightsome in midwinter, methinks."

"If there is anything on earth more gay and glorious than a ramble by night, when there is a moon, and a nor'west wind blows, bringing snow showers, followed by calm spells, during which the heaven is clear, and the world is wrapped in whiteness and light, I don't know of it."

"But do you never wish for some better shelter

than the tent on these same winter nights, when the frost bites shrewdly? You cannot always be wandering by moonlight."

"Better shelter there is none. You gentiles have coddled yourselves in hot, close rooms, so that the wholesome cold, which should strengthen you, gives you wheezy lungs and rheumatic diseases."

"'Tis good hearing that a tent is so healthy, for I shall soon have no better dwelling. Am going for a soldier."

"To France?"

"No; such war as Buckingham may make will be no schooling in the military art, or give promotion to those who deserve it. Drury and I are bound for Sweden the day after to-morrow, and I came to say good-bye."

Bess's face took on its look of musing, her eyes gazing into the distance. Then with perplexity in her face, she said—

"It is strange I have had no forewarning of this."

"What mean you? You don't in sober truth believe in the gift of prophecy, which your tribe pretend to!"

"I don't believe in it: I have it. We who live in Nature's bosom, and do not corrupt soul or body, hear and see what you house-dwellers cannot. Perhaps the spirits of the dead whisper to us, I know not; but we see pictures, and hear voices, and dream dreams, that warn us of things to come. Why should it be incredible to you? Did not

your lady see you in peril? By that token I knew her heart and nature."

"And you deal in all honesty when you promise rich husbands to farmers' daughters, and astound them by knowing what the kitchen wench told you?"

Bess laughed merrily.

"What harm is done by giving them pleasant dreams? But of your affairs now? Are you taking no steps against my father?"

"I have taken none."

"Then in kindness to me, do not. He is a broken man, and has not recovered the full use of his limbs, since he was racked by the old earl. He was overcome by your giving up yourself to save me, for he loves me in his fashion, and he made a clean breast to the young lord of all the practice against you."

"If I bore him malice never so much, it should be thrown to the wind for your sake, Bess, to whom I owe more than can be repaid."

"When you come back from the wars with honour and riches, you may repay any service the gipsy girl has done you a thousandfold."

"How?"

"By using voice and influence to protect a persecuted people."

"I never heard of your folk being persecuted in the Isle."

"No; the cruel laws do not trouble us in this corner of the land, but this very year, twenty of

our men were burned in Haddington, and as many women hanged."

"Had they been sheep-stealing?"

"Their only crime was their gipsy blood. They were condemned 'for being Egyptians.' And just now we are being harried in Durham and in Yorkshire. You don't know your law, justice of the peace that you would have been, if you had come to be squire of Temple."

"In truth, I don't, if this be law. Are you sure on't?"

"I have seen a woman of our own tribe flogged along the streets, half naked, with her baby at her breast, sheltering its little body from the lash of the scourge with her bare and bleeding arms, and, after the flogging, she was branded in the cheek with a hot iron 'for being an Egyptian.'"

"Why do your people abide in England, then?"

"Because it is worse for them elsewhere."

"If ever I come to be in any kind of authority, things shall be so far better in England as one man can make them, that I swear."

"God be with you, your Shield and Preserver, and bring you home again to your own country, able and willing to keep your vow."

So we clasped hands and parted.

Chapter XXIV

A LETTER from Anna awaited me on my return to the vicarage, from which I copy as much as it is fit for other eyes than mine to see.

"An armourer in Amsterdam has made himself a name and great gain by a shirt of mail, which is said to be verily pistol proof, and, at the same time, more light and flexible than any heretofore made. I have sent one for you, and one for your friend, and trust they will come to hand in time, and prove as useful as our military friends say they are. It will be great joy to me, if the idle gewgaws with which they were bought have been converted into stout and serviceable covering for the breast of my reckless soldier and his comrade. I try to persuade myself that danger flees from those who court it, for well I know you will ever be in the forefront of battle, when you anywise may. But for my sake, pray remember that there is a soldierly prudence.

"We have been here at the Hague for some weeks, my father having been called in to consult with the Stadtholder's physician; but in a few days we go to Leyden, where a professorship has been found for my father. Strangely enough, my

father has made acquaintance with yours, who had some business with the Stadtholder, and they fell into a mutual liking, before either knew the other's name. If they had but met in Axholme, how many evils might have been averted! Mr. Vavasour is about to go on some secret embassy to the East, at the instance of friends, who are in authority at Venice. Doubtless you know more of these Italian gentlemen. He spent more than an hour with us in our lodging, and made me think him a great and magnanimous man, who might have done the state much service, if he had been more highly placed. But he has sorely lacked woman's counsel to remind him of the near duty and the plain, homely wisdom which women have by instinct. Be you warned in time, my Frank. Your father has ruined his estate for want of a housewife's wit!

"You will be pleased to know that his leave-taking with me had a touch of fatherliness. . . .

"There is high dispute among the natural philosophers at Leyden whether it be true that some trees produce flowers but no fruit, and others fruit without flowers. My father bids me ask your answer to these questions following: Do oaks and beeches bear no flowers? Do the elm, poplar, and box bear neither flower nor fruit? He is reconciled to having you as a son-in-law, partly by the quickness and sureness with which you see and observe! Said he to me but yesterday, 'If Frank were here, I believe I could prove that fruit

is preceded by blossom far more often than has been supposed.' Yes; he called you 'Frank.' How I wish you were here, instead of preparing for Sweden and all the chances and horrors of the battlefield! Is it utterly impossible for you to come here before you join the army of King Gustavus?"

When I had read and re-read my letter, and while I was giving my aunt the news it contained, and the messages for herself, Dick Portington came in to bid me to a supper the next evening at the White Hart, where a number of old friends would meet, to wish me a good voyage, and drink to our next merry meeting. Although I had no great inclining to a banquet on the last evening before my departure, I could not bring my mind to offend my well-wishers by a refusal.

Dame Hind outdid herself in the provision she made for the feast, which was spread in the "court-room," the same in which Commissioner Tunstall had trouble with the wasps. Squire Stovin presided, whose ancestor was chief of the bowmen in the army of the Conqueror at Senlac Field. He was accounted one of the wisest and boldest gentlemen of the Isle. With him was his son George, a little older than I, and a good comrade. There were present also Squire Mell of Belton, and his son, who had stood by me at Belshaw, and Dick Portington and his father, the Squire of Tudworth, and some other gentlemen (twelve or more) whose names have not appeared in my pages, besides a

few men of humbler condition, among them being Daft Jack and my man Luke.

Over supper the talk at our table ran on the affairs of the nation; the seizure of our ships by the Duke of Epernon, and the coming war with France; the mystery of the policy of the King, or rather of the Duke of Buckingham. Some one voiced the opinion that the favourite had deep designs, incomprehensible to the vulgar. Squire Stovin laughed in contempt.

"Say 'contradictory to all the adages of common folk' and I am with you. 'You cannot have your cake and eat your cake,' runs the saw; Buckingham thinks he can. He believes the sky will rain potatoes, if he wishes it. He rules England just as much as the weathercock on my barn rules the wind."

"We may hope for better days, think you not," asked Squire Mell, "since the judges have at last taken a stand, and declared the new loan illegal?"

"I see not much promise in that, since the King's answer is to dismiss Sir Randal Carew from his Chief Justiceship," replied Stovin. "That is as high-handed a piece of tyranny as the sale of our land over our heads to the Dutchman; and the country takes it as tamely as we have ta'en the loss of our property and our rights."

"There are more than fifty gentlemen of the county committed to prison for refusing to pay the money demanded," said one.

"Ten of them had been appointed commissioners to collect the loan," said another.

"I heard a rumour the other day," said a third, "that the Earl of Lincoln is to be sent to the Tower."

"These are not times for our young men to be enlisting for foreign service; there will be civil war in England before we are much older," declared Squire Portington.

"There's not much sign of it yet," growled Stovin. "We are too white-livered for 't. But 'tis no bad thing some of our lads should learn how to win battles under a master of the art."

"Vavasour and Drury will be apt pupils, I warrant," said the younger Mell. "He is a good captain who knows how to get the victory when he is outnumbered three to one, and the enemy has horsemen and he footmen only. How the Mulgrave men fled at Belshaw!"

"Nay, the chief credit for that must be put down to thee," I replied.

"The Mulgrave men are not likely to be the tools of oppression in future," remarked Squire Mell. "The young earl is reducing the number of his train. And I have it on good authority that he has put the case of the Isle Commoners to my Lord Scrope in a new light. He is a just young man, and judicious beyond his years."

"The guest of the evening has reason to think so," some one said.

"Owes Frank for his coronet," another shouted.

"His earldom came to him by the judgment of the Almighty," answered Mell, gravely. "We know Vavasour had no intent to kill Lord Sheffield on the best of testimony—that of Frank himself, who would not lie to save his neck."

"'A speaks as straight as 'a hits and shoots," cried a voice from the other table.

"For my part," continued Mell, "I applaud the earl's courage in despising misconstruction."

"What is the meaning of the uproar below?" asked Portington, as we all listened to a noise of voices in anger and alarm, which came through the side door, just opened for the carrying out of the remnants of supper.

At the same moment, a servant rushed into the room, almost breathless.

"Would your honour condescend to come to give order what's to be done with a murthering villain?" she panted toward Squire Stovin.

A dozen men hurried forward, but the squire called out—

"Order, gentlemen. Be so good as to remain until I have seen what's the matter. Portington, Drury, Vavasour, follow me."

At first we could scarcely see, the change being great from the light of many wax candles to the dimness of the few tallow dips in tin sconces of the common room of the inn; but shortly we discerned a fellow held down on a chair by two men, Host Hind standing over him with a stout cudgel in his hand, and a group of labourers and the like,

who had been disturbed at their potations, as was plain by an overturned table, and a quantity of liquor spilled on the floor, and the shards of a broken jug. Briefly told, the matter stood thus: the man now on the chair had come, wrapped in a horseman's long cloak, and wearing a big beard; had called for Schiedam, and sat drinking by himself. A wandering cripple who played a pipe had entertained the company with the tricks of a Barbary ape, which made the round of the room after the performance, holding out a box for the gifts of the liberal. When the man in the cloak took no heed of him, the animal had pulled at his beard, which came off in his paw, whereupon the man had struck the beast, and the beast had instantly fastened his teeth in the man's hand. A scuffle followed, the stranger beating and trying to shake off the ape, its owner endeavouring to save the animal from the heavy blows which the stranger dealt on its head, and the company making confusion worse by crowding on the queer combatants. As soon as the ape had been struck down, the stranger had kicked it furiously, and also its owner the cripple, which stirred the ire of the spectators, who seized him, calling him a brutish villain. In struggling with them, the man had lost his cloak, revealing pistols in his belt, one of which he had pulled out, threatening to shoot. Host Hind had rapped him over the knuckles with his cudgel, called on two stout fellows to hold him, and sent a servant to Justice Stovin.

"Hold up your head, and let me have a closer sight of you; you and I have met before, or I am grossly mistaken."

So saying, the Squire took a candle from the wall, and passed it before the man's face, and I saw it was Vliet.

"Let every man in the room go elsewhere for a few minutes, barring the landlord and the gentlemen who accompanied me.

When the order had been obeyed, the Squire bade Hind to pinion the prisoner. Vliet looked at me with murderous eyes, but sullenly submitted.

"Now I have saved you from being made dogs' meat," said the Squire. "If the honest fellows in the house knew you were the Sebastian Vliet who escaped from arrest on the charge of attempted murder, and guessed you were lurking here, disguised, expecting that it would be easy to shoot a man, merry with wine, and thinking no evil, they would tear you limb from limb—small blame to them. Do you understand me?"

"If you permit," said John to the Squire, "I will be your interpreter."

Squire Stovin nodded, and there ensued some interchange of speech between the two.

"You have said much more than I did," quoth the Squire.

"I added a word of advice about the ape's bite, for which I received some choice Dutch blasphemy."

"What was the advice?"

"To allow me to apply a white-hot poker to the wound. The bite of an ape is a nasty thing."

"And what was the reply?" asked Dick.

"Stripped of the cursing, it was to the effect that my gentleman could make better use of a hot poker than to burn himself with it. Excuse me from repeating the precise terms: they were not in the best taste."

"Give him to understand that he will be removed to the lock-up, where he will be strongly guarded, and committed to Lincoln to-morrow."

"And you will give order that his hurt be looked to, will you not, Squire?" I put in.

"Why, in Heaven's name, should I concern myself about his rascally carcase? Why you should, God only knows."

I certainly did not know; but, nevertheless, a sort of pity had filled me for the wretched man, who had lost so much; love, above all, health, as his bloated face and body showed, his money, as I suspected from his threadbare garments, and every remnant of gentility and self-respect, as he proved by look and word and tone. Poor soldier of fortune though I was, I had infinite wealth in comparison.

"Well, be it so," said the Squire. "I will send for Tankersley."

Then Vliet burst out into a torrent of oaths in English, and the Squire bade John and me return to our friends, while he took measures for the safe custody of the prisoner. When we had satisfied the curiosity of our friends, and the Squire re-

appeared, the festivities went on again. After the King's health had been drunk, the Squire wishing him "wiser counsellors," my old friend made a speech about me, in which he said far more than it would be decent for me to write, even if I could remember it all. But some of his words dealt with the state of things in the Isle, and are, in my judgment, well worthy of remembrance.

"There have been Vavasours at Temple Belwood more than two hundred years, and most of them gentlemen of a public mind, but none more so than our 'solicitor,' Thomas Vavasour. He has lost his patrimony in defending our rights and properties. In all likelihood, he would not have relinquished his estate, but for his belief that his son was dead, and right sure I am that every gentleman in the Isle would have done what in his power lay, to retain the honourable family of Vavasour in its rightful seat. I may say that I, for one, endeavoured to persuade our solicitor to accept contributions from the Isle Commoners, towards the expenditure needful to maintain our cause, and I think it an error in judgment that he declined, but it was the error of a proud and generous man, and, moreover, of a man who had confidence in the administration of law in this country. His confidence was so far justified, that the highest court of law in the land decided in his favour, as it was bound to do. Mr. Vavasour did not expect that law and justice would be overridden by royal prerogative. No man expected that. We

have fallen on evil times, when a man's property may be taken from him by a stronger than he, on the plea that the stronger man can make a better use of it than the rightful owner. You may by and by have Charles and Cornelius walking into your grounds. They see a lake. Says Cornelius to Charles, 'I should like to fill up that lake, and grow potatoes there.' 'Says Charles to Cornelius, 'Give me so much, and you may.' And in spite of law and equity and reason, because Charles and Cornelius are giants, and you are a man of ordinary size, they do as they please. And they have the impudence to call themselves benefactors for growing potatoes where no potatoes grew before! But I crave pardon, gentlemen, for threshing this old straw over again. I will add but this: We have learned to our cost that the Dutchman's plans are as bad as his title. So the men of the south of the Isle have learned, and those who live on the border of the West Riding. I am sure the outfall will be choked up in a few years. The whole business is wrong, and will end in the ruin of the projectors, and then the inhabitants of the Isle may regain their rights. We are not likely to receive amends for our losses, I fear. One of our losses is the banishment of our solicitor and of his son, our guest."

The remainder of the Squire's speech was given to commendation of me, and good wishes for my future prosperity. The health was drunk with cheering enough to shake the rafters, which was

renewed, when I made the best reply I could to the kind things said by the Squire, and shouted from end to end of the tables.

Then the younger Mell called on us in a pleasant vein of talk to drink the health of John Drury; and John made a speech, full of merry quips and jests, that set us all laughing and put formality to rout.

While tongues were wagging of blithesome days in the forest, now no more to be enjoyed, of salmon-spearing in Trent, of otter hunts in Don, of duck-shooting on the meres, and the like sports and pastimes of the Isle, the wine flowing freely, and every other man blowing a cloud of tobacco-smoke from his lips, the landlord came to whisper in my ear that some one, whose name I did not catch, begged to have a word with me.

"Speak up, mine host," said I. "Who is it?"

"'Tis lawyer Gibberd from Hatfield, on pressing business, he says. And pressing it must be to bring such as he out on this bitter night. His feet were frozen to the stirrups, and his face and hands were awmost dead, but we've rubbed 'em well with snow. Says he's been well-nigh flayed out of his wits by highwaymen. He's been to the vicarage, and they sent him on here."

Before Hind had ended, nearly every one in the room was listening; and when I rose to go with him, wondering what this Gibberd, whose name I did not remember having heard, could want with me, Squire Stovin said—

"We have had one queer fish here this evening. By your leave, Vavasour, I will see whether the man is Gibberd."

I bowed and sat down, and the Squire went out, the younger Mell attending him. They returned shortly, bringing an elderly man with them, who blinked and coughed and trembled, as he took the chair placed for him.

"Fill a cup of brandy-wine for Mr. Gibberd," ordered the Squire. "Drink it off, man, and then tell Vavasour your news."

When the man of law had quaffed his drink, and coughed again, he began—

"You will pardon my intrusion on this festive occasion, and at this late hour, urgent business being my excuse. Indeed, if it had not been of a most pressing nature, I should not have faced the rigour of the weather, and the perils of the road, for I am by habit a home-keeping man, and not accustomed to be abroad after dark, especially at this time of the year. But as I chanced to hear, quite by accident, of your intention to leave the country to-morrow, though I was not fully assured of the truth of the information, I thought myself in duty bound to use the utmost haste and diligence in acquainting you with facts of the utmost consequence, being, in a sense, your professional adviser, at least for the immediate present, and as I hope and trust in the future also."

"Poor man! the frost has touched his brain," said Dick.

"But not his tongue," laughed John.

"If you can come to the point, I shall be obliged, Mr. Gibberd," said I.

Mr. Gibberd coughed, helped himself to a little more liquor, and continued—

"I had the honour to be the legal adviser of the late Mr. Staniforth, who died yesterday, very suddenly at the last, poor gentleman, though in my experience it is always sudden. Perhaps I should more correctly say 'observation,' but no matter. Of late, Mr. Staniforth has found comfort in making several testamentary dispositions of his property; since the death of his much-lamented son, he has done so often——"

"Let's have an end to this prolixity, man," thundered Squire Stovin. "You made poor old Staniforth's last will and testament? Is that what you mean?"

"I did."

"And he has left something to Mr. Frank Vavasour, eh?"

"He has left to Mr. Frank Vavasour, on condition of his taking the name of Staniforth, his house known as Staniforth Hall, his——"

"Cut it short, Mr. Gibberd; spare us the language of the law," said I.

"Everything he had is yours, Mr. Vavasour; his property in Staniforth, Sykehouse, Fishlake, Cowick, Baln, and Pollington; his money out on mortgage——"

Dick jumped up. "Fill your cups, gentlemen.

Here's to Frank Vavasour-Staniforth, or Staniforth-Vavasour, wishing him joy of his inheritance, and then three times three."

What an uproar the good fellows made! And when they had finished the three times three, some one shouted "One more!" and then another called for "Just a little one," and another for "A good one to end up with."

And so they went on, until they had made themselves hoarse and dry. Luke came and stood behind my chair.

"Ye can't do bout a bodysarvant now, Measter Frank. 'Tis my place. No running your head again' cannon bullets i' forrin parts, now. When be we agoin' to Holland?"

John gripped my hand, saying, "I suppose Providence makes no mistakes, but I could wish this stroke had not come just now. I hoped to see you a colonel at least, but Mistress Goel will forbid it."

"The first thing to be done," I answered, "is to go to the help of that worthy man in Hull."

"To-morrow, early," he answered heartily.

While this passed, the room was full of clamour of talk and laughter, which grew louder every moment, until Squire Stovin's great voice called for order.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this has been a trying time for our guest. I never heard that coming in to fortune killed a man, but this sudden change in our friend's affairs is something of a shock. If

you will accept my ruling, we will drink a parting cup, and go home. Frank shall invite us to a merry meeting as soon as he finds it convenient."

To this all agreed, and at length, after much handshaking, John and I walked together to the vicarage.

"You, too, will renounce the Swedish project," said I.

"Nay," he answered; "if I don't go abroad, I shall turn gipsy."

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